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Melilah is an interdisciplinary Open Access journal available in both electronic and book form concerned with Jewish law, history, literature, religion, culture and thought in the ancient, medieval and modern eras. *Melilah: A Volume of Studies* was founded by Edward Robertson and Meir Wallenstein, and published (in Hebrew) by Manchester University Press from 1944 to 1955. Five substantial volumes were produced before the series was discontinued; these are now available online. In his editorial foreword to the first edition, Robertson explained that *Melilah* had been established to promote Jewish scholarship in the face of the threat posed by the Second World War and its aftermath; the title of the journal refers to the ears of corn that are plucked to rub in the hands before the grains can be eaten (Deut. 23:25). The journal was relaunched as a New Series by Bernard Jackson and Ephraim Nissan in 2004 under the auspices of the Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Manchester. The current editors are Daniel Langton and Renate Smithuis.



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THE JEWISH ANNOTATED NEW TESTAMENT: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

Marc Zvi Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine*

ABSTRACT: *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, published by Oxford University in 2011, had little precedent: this was the first time that a group of Jewish scholars wrote a commentary (with supplemental essays) on the entire New Testament. As its editors, we were attentive to how the book would be perceived by a readership that, for various reasons, might find the volume at best odd, at worst scandalous. We conceived of and edited the volume with three main audiences in mind: Christians who wanted to know more about the Jewish background of the New Testament; Jews who had little familiarity with the New Testament; and readers from any background who were curious about the New Testament in its original historical matrix. In this essay we discuss our goals in writing the commentary for these audiences, such as overturning Christian stereotypes of Jews and Judaism and Jewish stereotypes of Christians and Christianity, and showing Jewish and Christian readers a part of their intertwined history. We also discuss the book's reception, which has been largely positive in Jewish and Christian communities and classrooms, despite acerbic and even frightening reviews and blog posts by a handful of readers.

As the editors of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament (JANT)*, published by Oxford University Press in 2011, we were attentive to how the book would be perceived by a readership that, for various reasons, might find the volume at best odd, at worst scandalous. Our venture had little precedent: this was the first time that a group of Jewish scholars convened to write a (brief) commentary on the entire New Testament, let alone to offer a collection of supplemental essays that addressed subjects ranging from the intersections of Judaism and the origins of Christianity to how Jews have understood the two main figures of the New Testament, Jesus and Paul, over the centuries.

We conceived of and edited the volume with three main audiences in mind: Christians who wanted to know more about the Jewish background of the New Testament; Jews who had little familiarity with the New Testament; and readers from any background who were curious about the New Testament in its original historical matrix. In terms of the first audience, we believe that to misunderstand Jewish practices and beliefs of the first century C.E. will necessarily result in a misunderstanding of Jesus of Nazareth and his followers; to have familiarity with this setting will help any reader better understand the contents of the New Testament.

Our goals went beyond providing basic historical information; we also sought to correct the negative stereotypes of Jews and Judaism that often, usually unintentionally, come to permeate Christian sermons and Bible studies. From our experiences in the classroom and

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in churches where we have taught scholar-in-residence programs, we are aware that some Christian readers view the Jews of Jesus' day (if not through the centuries) as hypocritical, greedy, legalistic, spiritually dead, militaristic, interested in retributive violence rather than restorative justice, xenophobic, and misogynist, if not out to undermine Christianity and to rule the world. These views are, not infrequently, inculcated in Sunday school lessons and reinforced in sermons. Were the volume to become mandatory reading for all Christian clergy and religious educators, it would go a long way toward alleviating these problematic teachings.

At the same time, well aware of the openness many of our Christian friends and many churches have shown toward Jewish history and Jewish readers, we also wished to demonstrate, reciprocally, our mutual respect. In 2001, the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued a study titled, "*The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*." This document affirmed both that "Although the Christian reader is aware that the internal dynamism of the Old Testament finds its goal in Jesus, this is a retrospective perception whose point of departure is not in the text as such, but in the events of the New Testament proclaimed by the apostolic preaching" (II,A,6) and that "Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion" (II,A,7). That is, it recognizes and respects Jewish interpretation of our own Scripture (the Tanakh). *JANT* is a response, in part, to the graciousness of this document: as the Pontifical Biblical Commission expresses a positive view of Jewish biblical interpretation, so we Jews reciprocate with a positive reading of the New Testament. Jewish interpretations of the Tanakh are not a recognized part of Catholic teaching, and the New Testament is not canonical for Jews. Mutual respect and a sense of shared history, however, make the study of each other's tradition a worthwhile, indeed essential, endeavor.

Many Jews have avoided reading the New Testament for various reasons: a concern that it would disparage Jews and Judaism; the presupposition that its texts would not only be strange but also alienating; perhaps even a fear of being seduced by the gospels. *JANT*, written entirely by Jews, might allow Jewish readers to find the text initially less alien, or alienating. We also wanted to show Jewish readers parts of our own history, since much of the New Testament is Jewish history: its principal figures are Jews; its imagery draws from the Scriptures of Israel; its legacy has impacted relations between Synagogue and Church for the past two millennia. We wanted as well to alert our Jewish readers to the problematic passages in the New Testament, both to provide some explanation as to what purpose they served in their original contexts and to show that most Christian readers do not move directly from a negative comment about Jewish people or practice to a negative view of Jews and Judaism. Just as reading about slavery in Egypt does not prompt Jews to hate Egyptians, and just as reading Deuteronomy does not make Jews desire to commit genocide against non-Jews in Israel, so we sought to show how Christian readers generally have their own filters that function to prevent anti-Semitism.

We also sought to correct the negative and false stereotypes that some Jewish readers have of Christians and Christianity, for we have also heard these stereotypes expressed in the classroom and in synagogue programs: that Christianity is a religion that cares only about belief and not about practice; that the ideas of a miraculous conception, resurrection from the dead, a divine manifest in different forms, an incarnate "Word," etc., make no

sense in a first-century Jewish context; that those who believe in Jesus, then or now, are either ignorant or superstitious. And if studying the New Testament prompts Jews to learn, or relearn, the material that it cites from the Tanakh or that finds connections in rabbinic literature, so much the better.

Usually with negative and sometimes tragic effects, the New Testament and its interpretations across the past two millennia have been instrumental in how Jews have been viewed and even in how they viewed themselves. Recognition of this influence is one factor in the increasing interest Jewish scholars have shown in the New Testament. (The Talmud offers several negative references to Jesus and to his followers – references that were often removed by Christian censors – but such negative views did not prevail over the centuries, and most Jews are unaware that they ever existed.) We are not the first within the Jewish community to advocate for reading the New Testament and understanding it positively rather than polemically. Writers such as Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), Claude Montefiore (1858-1938), Stephen Wise (1874-1949), Martin Buber (1878-1965), and Joseph Klausner (1874-1958) sought to reclaim Jesus for the Jewish tradition. Samuel Sandmel published several books on the New Testament, including the still-influential *We Jews and Jesus* (1965), and Hugh J. Schonfield's *The Passover Plot* (1965) was about as popular then, and as controversial, as Dan Brown's recent *The Da Vinci Code*. Today, well more than a *minyan* of Jews – many of them contributors to *JANT* – have published academic books and articles on Jesus and his followers. *JANT*'s annotations and essays demonstrate how rabbinic, medieval, and modern Jewish interpreters have understood Jesus; the volume also annotates the New Testament in light of early Jewish sources so that readers can see both connections and novel contributions.

Even Paul has been a prominent topic among Jewish thinkers, as Daniel Langton has recently demonstrated. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and R. Jacob Emden (1697-1776) commented positively on Paul, while later writers such as Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891), Kaufman Kohler (1843-1926), and Buber attributed to Paul a deformation of the more “Jewish” Jesus. This volume provides the historical context by which Paul can best be understood and so allows readers to judge him for themselves.

In relation to both Jewish and Christian readers, we were also cognizant of the need for resources for inter-religious families. For example, Christian parents concerned about their children's Jewish spouses or their Jewish grandchildren have sought a resource that would help them understand both how Judaism and Christianity are related, and how and why they separated. Similarly, Jews with Christian relatives have sought information about how to understand the Scriptures that their new family members hold as sacred.

Along with the practical needs, pedagogical interests also informed our vision of the volume. We view *JANT* as part of the larger genre of academically rigorous annotated Bibles, such as Oxford's *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Fourth Edition). Our hopes were that *JANT* would find a place alongside *The Jewish Study Bible* not only in the church- or synagogue-based adult education program but also in the classroom. This introduces a new challenge: how to convince young adults of all religious persuasions, and those of no religious background or allegiance at all, that the New Testament is a foundational book that should be read.

We do think that everyone ought to know the material in the New Testament, just as we would wish for biblical literacy of the Tanakh/Old Testament (and we do recognize that

these terms do not refer exactly to the same texts). We are all the cultural heirs of this material, from the texts Jews and Christians share (e.g., the creation and flood narratives; the Decalogue) to the New Testament's Sermon on the Mount, Good Samaritan, and Prodigal Son. The Bible, broadly defined, informs art and music, politics and economics, and views of the past and hopes for the future.

For classroom instruction, *JANT* contributes to discussions of the so-called "historical Jesus" and the "new perspective on Paul." It has the potential also to contribute to the return of the recognition that the New Testament and rabbinic literature are often mutually informative. In the late twentieth century, students of the Bible – sensitized to how rabbinic literature had been misused in the study of Jesus and of the New Testament – pulled away from any use of rabbinic texts. Today, scholars are increasingly both carefully using rabbinic texts to help us understand the New Testament as well as using the New Testament to shed light on rabbinic thought. Thus, instead of Judaism serving only as the background for understanding the New Testament, now the New Testament also serves as a background for reconstructing Jewish history and for informing rabbinic interpretation.

For the purposes of the academy, we also find that *JANT* opens several questions of sociology. For example: how does the focus on Jesus as a Jew, the recognition that all of Jesus' immediate followers were Jews, and the historical reclamation of Jesus by Jews impact our understanding today of the various forms of Messianic Judaism, from Jews for Jesus to Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism? What contributions does the volume make to those followers of Jesus today who, although they do not identify as "Jewish," maintain Jewish practice, sometimes in imitation of (what they view as) Jesus and his initial Jewish followers? In turn, how might the recognition of Jesus as a Jew who engages in the distinctive practices of his tradition help relatively secularized people or low-church Protestants better understand (and, ideally, appreciate) such traditions as ritual purity, sacrifice, pilgrimage, and communitarian religiosity?

To extend these pedagogical concerns: we do have hopes that students of the New Testament will take the time to read Jewish sources, including early rabbinic works, even if these, in their final form, postdate the New Testament. The move in some Ph.D. programs toward more and more theory (post-colonial, affect theory, deconstruction, ideological criticism, empire studies, so-called social-scientific studies, neurological-cognitive views, memory studies, etc.) and the resulting decrease in time spent with the primary sources of the period, does create some worry that Ph.D. students in New Testament have never seen a copy of the Mishnah, read the books of the Pseudepigrapha, or seen more than a paragraph or two (in translation) from the scrolls found at Qumran.

Finally, we hope this volume will help prevent the "all Jews think this way" or "that way" approach and thus show how Jesus and his followers fit within their very diverse contexts, even as we show some generally consistent views within that spectrum. For example, in some classrooms, although first-century Judaism is presented as diverse, with references made to the classic quartet of "Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots" (the configuration comes from Josephus, who compares each group to contemporaneous Greek and Roman philosophical parties), the dominant view given the students is of a monolithic, and often moribund, Judaism. *JANT* shows the Jewish matrix of the New Testament in all its vibrant diversity.

We have been gratified by the largely positive reception of the book and its use in both the Jewish and the Christian communities as well as in classrooms, where, along with other publications, it has begun to change religious groups' perception of the other and, at times, perceptions of themselves. We did hit 354 on the Amazon site the day the volume was discussed in the *New York Times*. More recently, on July 31, 2014, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* was the second-best selling book in the category "[Books](#) > [Textbooks](#) > [Humanities](#) > [Religious Studies](#) > [Judaism](#)"; for a long time after it was published, it was number one. Endorsements for the volume have come from Evangelical and liberal Protestants, Mormons, and Roman Catholics, as well as from Jews across the spectrum from the Modern Orthodox to the disaffiliated secularist. As a result of *JANT*, many Christians have come to realize just how deeply embedded their tradition is in Jewish history, theology, and ethics; many Jews have come to learn of the deep historical connections between what we eventually came to recognize as the Synagogue and the Church. And many learned that the stereotypes they had of the other required correction. These were our overarching social goals in completing this project.

We know from reviews and blog posts, which we cite below, that some of our readers were not at all pleased with the project. We heard early on that many Jews, and not a few Christians, initially perceived the work to be the product of messianic Jews with the goal of bringing Jewish readers to belief in Jesus as lord and savior. On the other hand, we were also forewarned that some Christian readers feared that the volume would challenge or even disparage ecclesial beliefs. Thus the tone of the entire volume is one that treats Christian doctrine with the utmost respect, even as it describes the distinct paths that the majority of the Jewish community and the followers of Jesus eventually chose.

Some Jews felt, and still feel, that the New Testament is fundamentally *treyf*, and any treatment of the New Testament by Jews is wrong-headed. We were not surprised, although nevertheless disappointed, when one of the first reviews on Amazon, likely written by someone who did not read the book, was titled "Evil." It was penned by "A Jew for Judaism" – a play, we believe, on "Jews for Jesus." The reviewer was crass, though to the point: "It is evil for Christians to try to convert Jews with this dreck. Why don't you people leave us in peace?" This misinformed writer did not realize that the book was written by Jews, in part for Jews. A more recent similar review by "Asher," who identifies in his profile as Jewish (though also as a former Christian and a former pagan), is titled "misleading" and notes, "The Christian NT has nothing to do with Judaism nor Jewish beliefs. Both religions lead to Gd but are separate and incompatible. Continuing to deny that and attempts to 'Judaize' the NT are intentionally misleading[.]" We tried to combat such views in the volume by making accessible the main scholarly consensus about the New Testament and Judaism: many of its authors perceived themselves and were perceived by others as Jewish; the religion of Jesus and his early followers such as Peter, James, and Mary Magdalene was one of the many forms of Judaism that existed in the first century C.E.

Similar critical attitudes also appeared on the Christian blogs. One of the earliest comments that appeared about the book, from a Carmelite blogger on a conservative Catholic blog, read: "Without having read it, and I can guarantee you I never will, I would guess it's a new bold attempt by the Rabbinic Talmudists to undermine the Faith. They are

convinced that Trinitarianism, of which the Church is obviously the bulwark, is a blasphemy which must be destroyed and will stop at nothing.”¹ Coming from a Catholic, this view was particularly disheartening, given the import the Vatican, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and other Catholic organizations have placed on Jewish-Catholic dialogue, the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, and the Jewishness of Jesus.

The same website contains the following comment: “Judaizers will always be around until the end of time. Watch out for them.” It is quite strange for us to imagine ourselves as either “Judaizers” or “Rabbinic Talmudists.” The former group are, technically, members of the Church who continue to follow Jewish practice, such as circumcision, dietary regulations, Jewish holidays, etc.; the latter is a phrase anachronistic for both the time of Jesus and our own time.

Much more frightening was the blog post titled “Jew Creeps Using the New Testament: Christian Brainwashing by Jews.”² The first paragraph states: “Do these creeps ever leave anything untouched? Must they worm themselves into every facet of White people’s lives? Nothing is off limits to the Jew!” The author makes one correct statement in the entire ranting post: “The book is NOT to convert Jews, but to push the ‘Jesus was Jewish’ bit on American Christians.” This to him is impossible, since most Jews are descended from the Khazars, a myth that has circulated widely, and lately in an attempt to minimize Jewish presence in the ancient world. (Shaul Stamper has recently debunked this myth and its modern uses.³)

Although this quote came from a white supremacist blog, reflecting a minority of the American population, it received some traction in the US and abroad; indeed, on July 31, 2014, it contained a comment from “Dan in Taiwan” who asked, “What did St. Hitler do to pull Germany out of poverty and despair? Perhaps we can use his ideas as a model.” It is doubtful that *JANT* can change the mind of anyone with such views, though it is very important, for the sake of a civil and civilized society, to think about what it could do. The very reactions we list here testify to the continued importance of *JANT*; perhaps, were homilists and Sunday school teachers better informed about Jesus and Paul’s Jewish context, they would be less likely to inculcate anti-Jewish views that then surface on such websites. Perhaps people in churches who were aware of this context would be more likely to condemn such racist, anti-Jewish postings.

Despite the occasional bigoted or ignorant review, the response to *JANT* has been overwhelmingly positive. Many ministers and priests have told us that it is now their “go-to” volume as they prepare sermons. The book is being increasingly assigned in divinity school and seminary classrooms, given its attention both to historical context and to its noting of where Christian exegesis and homiletics, unaware of Jewish history, theology, and practice, lead to false witness against Jews and Judaism.

Even more striking to us is the penetration of the volume into the Jewish public. We know of many study-groups throughout the world where Jews are working together, sometimes in *hevruta* style, to read the New Testament with the annotations *JANT* provides. This is sometimes their first and only Bible study group. Instead of reading the Tanakh, they have opted to read the New Testament, albeit a version with “Jewish” notes.

¹ See <http://catholicforum.fisheaters.com/index.php?topic=3444433.0>

² See <http://incogman.net/2012/02/jew-creeps-using-the-new-testament/>

³ See e.g. <http://new.huji.ac.il/en/article/22007>

We will leave to sociologists, and perhaps to scholars of the failure of Jewish education, to explain in more detail why reading the New Testament is more attractive to some committed Jews than reading the Tanakh.

The success of *The Jewish Study Bible* has spurred us to produce a new edition of *JANT*, which we anticipate to be published in 2017. In the second edition, we plan to address several concerns readers had with the first edition (yes, we know the print in the first edition is too small; that is the first issue to be rectified). For example, many Jews (and not a small number of Christian readers) commented to us that they did not fully understand basic issues – for example: they did not recognize the genres of “gospel” and “epistle”; they did not know how the gospels are related – general issues that are covered in any introductory New Testament textbook.

The tone of the new edition will stay the same, and we will continue to respect the needs of Jews interested in Christianity as well as of Christians interested in Judaism. We will also keep in mind that *JANT* is also used as a textbook for many college, university, and seminary courses.

JANT has, by numerous reports, strengthened the knowledge Jews and Christians have of their intertwined history; it has enhanced the classroom experience by giving students various new perspectives – not only historical, but also theological, ethical, and sociological – on the New Testament; it has led to new interreligious dialogues. This is all to the good.

SAVING THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL: PURITY, FORGIVENESS, AND SYNAGOGUES IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Anders Runesson*

ABSTRACT: It is commonplace in New Testament studies to point out that ancient writings need to be understood within their contemporary context if a historical reading is what we aim for. Most often, however, the framework within which to understand a text's thought patterns is sought in the world of ideas that can be found in other literary texts roughly contemporaneous with the text under investigation. It is far less common for scholars to provide a detailed analysis of the institutions of ancient societies in which the transmission of oral traditions and the production of texts were embedded, and allow this socio-institutional setting to interpret the thought patterns of a text. In this study, key ritual-theological themes in Matthew's narrative world are linked to, and understood from within, first-century synagogue institutions. As a result, Matthew's theology of purity, forgiveness, and atonement emerge as thoroughly intertwined with a first-century Jewish worldview rather foreign to later forms of mainstream Christianity.

1. Introduction: Reading Matthew in Institutional Settings

While no one would contest the fact that Jesus visited and proclaimed his message in the synagogues of primarily Galilee but also of Judaea, it is rare to see studies that seriously ponder the socio-political and religious implications of this institutional setting for our understanding of his message. Indeed, when scholars speak of the early Jesus movement and the Gospels it is not uncommon that they assume the existence of not one but two distinct institutional contexts, one associated with Judaism ("synagogue") and the other associated with Christianity ("church"), as if these two existed as separate entities in the first century.¹ Such use of terminology reflects assumptions about the New Testament texts in relation to Jews and Judaism that construes, implicitly or explicitly, "Judaism" and "Christianity," as we know them today, as two distinct religious movements already at this time.

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¹ For terminological problems relating to Jews and (Jewish and non-Jewish) Christ-believers in the first century, see discussion in Anders Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I," in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, ed. Bengt Holmberg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 62-74; Anders Runesson, "Paul's Judaism: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussions," in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, eds. Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 53-77. For a full discussion of the use of the term *ekklesia* in antiquity, see Ralph Korner, "Before 'Church': Political, Ethno-Religious and Theological Implications of the Collective Designation of Pauline Christ-Followers as *Ekklesiai*" (Ph.D thesis, McMaster University, 2014). In the first century, *ekklesia*, often erroneously translated "church," was a term used for a variety of Graeco-Roman and Jewish institutions, and its use in Paul's letters or in Matthew's Gospel, for example, can therefore not be referred to in order to suggest a "parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity," since it is not a term indicating, as "church" does, an institutional setting exclusively meant for Christ-believers. See further discussion below.

In this study I would like to discuss how recent research on the ancient synagogue may shed light not only on questions relating to the so-called parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, but also on theological themes central to Christian theology, such as eschatology, holiness, and forgiveness. Doing so, it will become apparent that these theological themes, so important for Christian identity, can hardly be understood apart from their Jewish context. In order to show this, we shall focus on Matthew's Gospel and proceed in two main steps. First, we shall discuss the nature of first-century synagogues. As we shall see, behind the twenty-five Greek, Hebrew, and Latin terms used in antiquity to designate what we translate into English with one single word as "synagogue" lie two types of institution, neither of which is identical to the later Rabbinic synagogue which gave birth to all modern mainstream forms of Judaism.

This distinction between two types of institution, which is of key importance for our understanding of first-century Jewish society, will then function as the point of departure for the second part of the study, in which we shall enter into Matthew's narrative world and discuss how institutional structures described there may shed light on the thought patterns of the Gospel. In other words, in order to understand first-century portrayals of interaction between followers of Jesus and other Jews, as well as the theological constructs that were produced as a result of this interaction, we need to move beyond anachronistic assumptions about later Rabbinic and Christian institutional forms and seek to untangle the complexities of a world which is not ours, but in which most of the New Testament texts – texts that are still used today – were written.

2. Beyond the Rabbis: The Nature of First-Century Synagogues

What was a synagogue in the time of Jesus? Or when the Gospels were written? How do we understand the word "synagogue" when we read it in the New Testament? Perhaps the easiest way of defining and explaining the nature of the ancient synagogue is by contrasting a modern synagogue and the activities taking place within it with the city hall of any given city.

The synagogue as a public municipal institution, a religio-political city hall of sorts, is the most common type of synagogue referred to in the New Testament Gospels.² The modern synagogue has very little in common with the activities that took place in such ancient public institutions, apart from some liturgical aspects which have been maintained in relation to sabbath services. The modern synagogue goes back to the Rabbis, and rabbinic Judaism did not exist in Jesus' time, or at the time when the Gospels were written.³ This public institution, we may call it the public synagogue, in which Jesus

² For discussion of the synagogue as it is represented in the New Testament Gospels and in relation to historical-Jesus research, see Anders Runesson, "The Historical Jesus, the Gospels, and First-Century Jewish Society: The Importance of the Synagogue for Understanding the New Testament," in *A City Set on a Hill: Essays in Honour of James F. Strange*, eds. Daniel A. Warner and Donald D. Binder (Mountain Home, AR: BorderStone Press, LLC, 2014), 265-297.

³ Rabbinic Judaism was born at some point after the fall of the temple in 70 CE, i.e., around the same time as the Gospels were written. However, just as Apostolic, or Messianic, Judaism (for terminology, see Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity," 72-73, and the chart on page 74) was a minority form of Judaism at that time, Rabbinic Judaism was a marginal movement with no interest in the synagogue. Local public synagogues were run by local authorities, often of priestly descent. For discussion of the lack of Rabbinic influence in ancient synagogues, and issues relating to leadership more generally, see, e.g., Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale

taught, healed, and exorcized demons according to the Gospels, was the administrative centre of towns and villages in Galilee and Judaea. It had its origins in the city gates of Persian Period Yehud; these gates were, at the time, the local public space providing a home for the administrative and other activities, including public Torah reading, that later took place in public synagogues in the first century.⁴ In these public synagogues decisions were made regarding all things local; archives were kept there, judicial proceedings took place there, and since, in antiquity, people did not distinguish between the secular and the religious, the Torah was read and discussed publicly on Sabbaths.

Architecturally, the closest modern analogy to the public synagogue would probably be the British Parliament. This type of architecture was made for interaction: discussion and debate. The focal point of the building was not, as in most modern synagogues and churches, on an item placed at one of the walls (like a Torah shrine or an altar), but on the empty centre in the middle of the room from where, on Sabbaths, the Torah was read.⁵

It is of some interest to note that both men and women were present in meetings held in this institution; such gender inclusivity departs from the more general pattern in Graeco-Roman societies, in which only men were allowed to attend public meetings. As for leadership, no specific Jewish group, such as the Pharisees,⁶ was in charge, but village scribes were leading figures. While anyone who was able could read portions from, and participate in discussions of, the Torah on Sabbaths, the scribes most likely dominated the interpretation of the texts.⁷ These scribes could be influenced in their understanding of Torah and Jewish life by groups such as the Pharisees, or the Jesus movement, but we may safely assume that local traditions were more important than the Jewish parties for the interpretation of the law, at least in the rural areas of Galilee.⁸

Despite this emphasis on the local, however, it seems clear that there were also some aspects of the law that were generally agreed upon. Most importantly, as is shown by the ritual baths (*miqwa'oth*) and the stone vessels found all over the land, ritual purity was a

University Press, 2005), 412-529. See also Lee Levine, "The Sages and the Synagogue in Late Antiquity," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 201-224; Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 157-173; Günter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 121-160, and esp. pages 277-283. Cf. Chad S. Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities: Methodology: Analysis and Limits* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), who notes, and agrees with, the growing consensus that "rabbis did not have significant influence over synagogue worship prior to the medieval period" (3).

⁴ For extensive discussion of the evidence and various theoretical approaches to origins questions, see Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (ConBNT 37; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

⁵ For discussion of synagogue architecture, including viewshed analysis, see James F. Strange, "Archaeology and Ancient Synagogues up to about 200 CE," in *The Ancient Synagogue: From its Origins until 200 CE*, eds. Birger Olsson and Magnus Zetterholm (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003), 37-62.

⁶ Cf. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 41: "[T]he truth of the matter is, the Pharisees had little or nothing to do with the early synagogue, and there is not one shred of evidence pointing to a connection between the two. No references associate the early Pharisees (the 'Pairs' and others) with the synagogue, nor is there anything in early synagogue liturgy that is particularly Pharisaic."

⁷ On scribes and scribal culture, see most recently Chris Keith, *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), esp. 71-123, and Chris Keith, *Jesus Against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). The latter study deals more explicitly with the synagogue setting.

⁸ We have no evidence from the first century mirroring the situation portrayed in 2 Chronicles 17:7-9, where it is stated that King Jehoshaphat sent travelling priests and Levites from Jerusalem to the cities of Judah to teach the people the law, using the "book of the Law" (v. 9; *sefer Torah*; LXX: *byblos nomou*), thus controlling the interpretation and application of the law in the land.

universal concern in first-century Jewish society.⁹ Stone vessels were thought of as not susceptible to ritual impurity, and were therefore practical. It seems clear that, while it was a matter of course that purity was required before entering the Jerusalem temple, in the first century people in all parts of the land were concerned about maintaining a certain level of purity even if they were not planning to travel to Jerusalem.¹⁰ Ritual purity does not seem to have been required, though, to enter public synagogues. The *miqwa'oth* found adjacent to such synagogues were most likely located there because it was the public place in any given town, as shown by Susan Haber.¹¹ These synagogue buildings were, as far as the evidence can tell us, not regarded as holy space.¹²

Interestingly, there is evidence that some Jews understood purity to apply also to behaviour; for these Jews, moral purity could be as important or even more important than ritual purity.¹³ As we shall see, this approach to purity and sin will shed light on an important aspect of Matthean theology. But before we enter the narrative world of the Gospel, we need to complement and expand the discussion of first-century synagogues.

Up till now we have focussed on the institutions in which Jesus proclaimed his message of the kingdom. We have called these institutions public synagogues, and their function in towns and villages compares well with modern city halls, with an added religious dimension. But there also existed another type of institution designated by the same terms as the public synagogues, institutions which belonged to specific Jewish groups, such as the Essenes.¹⁴ In the land of Israel, we have, in addition to the Essenes, the “synagogue of the

⁹ On stone vessels, see Ronald Deines, *Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Yitzhak Magen, *The Stone Vessel Industry in the Second Temple Period: Excavations at Hizma and the Jerusalem Temple Mount* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2002); Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67-68. While Deines's study is very helpful, I agree with Chancey that his thesis that the presence of stone vessels indicates Pharisaic influence is problematic. Regarding *miqwa'oth*, see Boaz Zissu and David Amit, “Common Judaism, Common Purity, and the Second Temple Period Judean Miqwa'ot (Ritual Immersion Baths),” in *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, eds. Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 47-62, who conclude that “[t]he wide distribution of ritual baths reinforces Sanders's assertion that the purity laws were generally obeyed by the Jewish populations.” (62). For a local-specific example, see most recently Ronny Reich and Marcela Zapata, “A Preliminary Report on the Miqwa'ot of Migdal,” *IEJ* 64:1 (2014): 63-71. While the authors discuss the possibility of these *miqwa'oth* serving the synagogue, they ultimately refrain from such conclusions because of the distance between the synagogue building and the *miqwa'oth* (ca. 70 meters). *Miqwa'oth* have been discovered adjacent to several other second-temple synagogues (the authors mention Masada, Herodium, Gamla, Jericho, Modi'in); see Ronny Reich, “The Synagogue and the Miqweh in Eretz-Israel in the Second Temple, Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods,” in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, eds. D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 289-297. The functional relationship between synagogue and *miqweh* is, however, not clear. As Susan Haber, “*They Shall Purify Themselves*”: *Essays on Purity in Early Judaism*, ed. Adele Reinhartz (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 161-179, has argued, it is unlikely that ritual washings were required before entering a public synagogue, as opposed to the practice in Diaspora synagogues where, judging from the archaeological remains, the washing of hands and/or feet was likely required. On various understandings of (ritual and moral) purity, see Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Cf. John C. Poirier, “Purity Beyond the Temple in the Second Temple Era,” *JBL* 122:2 (2003): 247-265.

¹¹ Susan Haber, “*They Shall Purify Themselves*”: *Essays on Purity in Early Judaism*, ed. Adele Reinhartz (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 161-179: “[T]he local-specific evidence pointing to the association of *miqwa'ot* with synagogues appears to be spatial rather than functional” (178).

¹² For discussion, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 44, 77-79, 172; regarding later periods, see pages 200-203.

¹³ See especially Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*; cf. Eyal Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in Light of Ancient Greek Practice and Qumranic Ideology,” *HTR* 97:4 (2004): 383-411.

¹⁴ See Philo, *Prob.* 80-83 (for text, translation, bibliography, and comments, see Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity Series 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), hereafter abbreviated *ASSB*, no. 40. Philo uses the term *synagōgē* for the association of the Essenes, and he describes their gathering place as sacred space. For further discussion of the two types of institution referred to by synagogue terms, and their respective origins, see Runesson, *Origins*.

Freedmen,”¹⁵ and the *synagōgē* mentioned in the Theodotos inscription, both institutions located in Jerusalem.¹⁶ The closest ancient analogy which may describe this type of institution is the Graeco-Roman voluntary associations, the *collegia*, or *thiasoi*. In the Diaspora, the Romans categorised synagogues together with other (non-Jewish) associations.¹⁷

Graeco-Roman associations could serve a number of different purposes, from gatherings of occupational guilds, to meetings of people sharing a common ethnic background, or worshipping the same god or goddess. Architecturally, associations often provided space for communal dining and feasting. Groups could gather in larger private houses, or in purpose-built structures adapted for larger groups. Such associations would have their own specific community rules outlining acceptable behaviour and stipulate various forms of punishment for those who did not comply with the rules. Such punishment would commonly consist of fines or, in severe cases, exclusion from the community.

In the Diaspora, Jewish associations, or association synagogues, are best understood as ethno-religious immigrant groups. Many of them were open and welcoming also of interested non-Jews (commonly termed “God-fearers,” or sympathisers in the literature).¹⁸ Some, however, were more secluded and dedicated to very specific forms of Judaism, such as the Therapeutai, described at length by Philo.¹⁹ The situation in the land was similar in terms of the more open or sectarian nature of such associations, although the ethnic identity of the groups naturally did not need to be emphasised in that setting. For example, several scholars have suggested that the Dead Sea Scrolls sect belonged among the numerous voluntary associations that prospered in the Hellenistic-Roman period.²⁰

¹⁵ Acts 6:9 (ASSB, no. 18). The membership of the synagogue of the Freedmen seems to have been based on a network of people with common background.

¹⁶ ASSB, no. 26. The purpose of the Theodotos synagogue was to provide a place especially for pilgrims (the inscription mentions a “guest chamber” and “upper rooms,” as well as water facilities for ritual washings). Most importantly, the inscription states that this *synagōgē* was dedicated to “the reading of the law and the teaching of the commandments.”

¹⁷ For synagogues as a Jewish variant of Graeco-Roman associations, see especially Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), revised edition published online in 2013: <http://philipharland.com/associations/>; Peter Richardson, *Building Jewish in the Roman East* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), esp. 207–221.

¹⁸ If we are seeking modern explanatory analogies, one of the closer ones would be immigrant associations such as, e.g., the Portuguese Association of St Michael the Archangel in Hamilton, Canada. Here, we find an immigrant group who also highlights its religious identity; it is also open to visitors beyond the Portuguese community.

¹⁹ Philo, *Contempl.* 30–33 (ASSB, no. 160). They are described as coming together for a “general assembly” (*eis koinon syllogon*) every seventh day; the place of meeting is described as a “sanctuary” (*semneion*).

²⁰ So Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, *Civic Ideology, Organization, and Law in the Rule Scrolls: A Comparative Study of the Covenanters’ Sect and Contemporary Voluntary Associations in Political Context* (Lieden: Brill, 2011). Gillihan summarises his own work as follows: “[M]ost ancient groups appropriated patterns from the state. Comparison of the Rule Scrolls with Greco-Roman constitutional literature, as well as philosophical, rabbinic, and early Christian texts, shows that the sect’s appropriation helped articulate an “alternative civic ideology” by which members identified themselves as subjects of a commonwealth alternative and superior to that of the status quo. Like other associations with alternative civic ideology, the Covenanters studied constitution and law with the intention of reform, anticipating governance of restored Israel at the End of Days.” The interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls sectarians as a Jewish voluntary association was made earlier by Moshe Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect: A Comparison With Guilds and Religious Associations of the Hellenistic Period* (NovT et orbis antiquus 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), and Mattias Klinghardt, “The Manual of Discipline in the Light of the Statutes of Hellenistic Associations,” in *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khiribeth Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, ed. Michael O. Wise et al. (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1994), 251–267.

Other groups, such as the Pharisees, were more open and were engaged in public Jewish society.²¹

Now, what complicates matters is that the same terms were used interchangeably for both the public synagogues and the association synagogues. The most common Greek words used were *synagōgē* (a “gathering,” or the building in which the gathering took place), *proseuchē* (“prayer hall”), and a term that has often been mistranslated as “church”: *ekklēsia*. *Ekklēsia* simply means assembly, and the word was originally used in Classical Greece to designate a democratic-like institution, in which all free men had a say in the public affairs of the city. But *ekklēsia* was also used by the Jews as a synagogue term, both for public synagogues and association synagogues.²² This means, among other things, that when *ekklēsia* is used in New Testament texts to designate a community of Christ-believers, we cannot draw the conclusion that they had divorced themselves from “the synagogue,” or from “Judaism” as many scholars have mistakenly argued. It was not until later that the term *ekklēsia* came to be used exclusively for what we call “church” today, and by that time, and probably as a consequence of that terminological development, mainstream Judaism had chosen “synagogue” as the sole designation for their institution.

In the first century, these terms were used interchangeably by Philo and Josephus, in inscriptions and in the New Testament as referring to either public synagogues or association synagogues. The definition of the term is thus dependent on the context in which it occurs; its meaning must be argued on a case-by-case basis. In the New Testament Gospels, *synagōgē* is, as we noted above, most often used for public synagogues, and *ekklēsia* is used three times to refer to a specific association, claimed to have been founded by Jesus himself, with Peter as the leading figure. As it happens, all three of these occurrences of the term *ekklēsia* are found in Matthew’s Gospel, to which we now turn.²³

3. Synagogue and Community in Matthew’s Narrative World

What I would like to discuss here is not the socio-religious realities of the Matthean community, but rather the narrative world of Matthew’s Gospel. We shall ask two main questions: First, how are public synagogues described, and what function do they fill in the world of the text? Second, how is the association synagogue, the *ekklēsia* of the Jesus-followers, described and why is this institution so important for Matthew when none of the other Gospels mention it? Let us begin with the question of how public synagogues are used narratively as a setting for Jesus’ proclamation in Matthew.

²¹ Note the possible mention of a Pharisaic association synagogue in Matt 12:9 (discussion in Runesson, *Origins*, 355-357). Note also that Luke 14:1 speaks of “a leader of the Pharisees,” indicating the existence of a hierarchy, which in turn reveals institutional structures, such as we would expect to find them in associations. While the evidence is scarce, other Jewish groups, such as the Sadducees and the Fourth Philosophy, all mentioned by Josephus (*B.J.* 2.119-166; *A.J.* 18.11-25; cf. *A.J.* 13.171-173), should be understood along similar lines as association-like groups, since the associations provide the closest ancient analogy for such group formation.

²² For literature discussing this terminology, see n. 1 above.

²³ Matt 16:18; 18:17.

3.1 Public Synagogues: Eschatological Battlefields

First we should note that, historically, any interaction in public synagogues in the first century indicates involvement in Jewish society, not withdrawal from it. This is also what we find in Matthew's story. Here, the narrator states paradigmatically, twice, that, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people" (Matt 4:23; cf. 9:35).

Both success and conflict is reported from encounters in this setting, and the Matthean Jesus also predicts future suffering and punishment in synagogues for his disciples (10:17; cf. 23:34). All of this describes a deep involvement in Jewish society, not only of Jesus but also of his followers, even after his death. There is no hint in the narrative of either Jesus or the movement around him leaving these institutions, and thus public Jewish society, behind. On the contrary, in the narrative, public synagogues represent public "battlefields" as the kingdom approaches. Jesus and his followers engage local Jewish towns, primarily in Galilee, healing and proclaiming what they perceive of as good news, namely that this is the time to repent and to prepare for the coming judgment and the kingdom of heaven, in which the last shall be the first, and the least shall be the greatest (Matt 19:30; 20:16; 23:12).

This involvement of the movement around Jesus in public Jewish society is quite distinct from, for example, the strategy of the sectarian community, or communities, that can be reconstructed from the Dead Sea Scrolls. These covenanters had chosen to withdraw from society and establish their own sacred community, preparing for the coming eschatological war. The Matthean Jesus and his disciples, on the contrary, are campaigning across the land in public institutions and elsewhere, clearly aiming at setting in motion a mass movement to save Israel,²⁴ or, more precisely, to rescue the "lost sheep of the House of Israel," i.e., the people that they perceived of as abused and abandoned by their leaders (Matt 9:36).²⁵ Since this campaign is said to be carried out in public religio-political institutions, where local residents gathered for various purposes related to their community, it is impossible to ignore the political implications of this "kingdom talk" that is so prominent in the Gospel. When we read Matthew in such public institutional settings we are reminded that what we separate and call "religion" and "politics" were, in antiquity, interwoven aspects of communal life.

Interestingly, the sectarians witnessed in the Dead Sea Scrolls were also very much involved in re-imagining religio-political order, and saw their vision of a just society coming to life as a result of apocalyptic end-time developments. For them, too, there could not be a distinction between "religion" and "politics"; their hopes could not, as Matthew's vision could not, be realised with less than a complete remodelling of Jewish society to bring it in line with God's intents. What differs between Jesus and the movement around him as Matthew describes it on the one hand, and these Qumran sectarians on the other, is the method they employ to achieve their (and, as they see it, the God of Israel's) goals for a

²⁴ Cf. Rom 11:26.

²⁵ Cf. Matt 15:24.

renewed and reconstituted Israel, and, indeed, a reinvented world.²⁶ For the Matthean Jesus' purposes and hopes, the public synagogues were key; they represented eschatological combat zones where battles were fought against inaccurate interpretations of Jewish law, which threatened to make God's people liable to the eschatological judgment, as well as against evil forces materialising as decease and illness, which were cured.²⁷ For the sectarians, on the other hand, public Jewish society threatened to compromise their status as a pure community, "the sons of light," as they designated themselves, and they chose, consequently, to withdraw and gather in a secluded setting with little or no contact with the outside world. In the sectarian realm there were no people with disabilities, since full membership could only be given to "unblemished" individuals (mirroring the requirements for priests serving in the Jerusalem temple).

The fact that Jesus is portrayed as engaging in public synagogues may thus tell us a lot about what he, in Matthew's eyes, wanted to achieve as well as about the nature of the kingdom he worked to bring into being. It will also help us understand the Matthean Jesus' (and, in this case, I would argue the historical Jesus') relationship to other Jewish groups and public Jewish society. If we were to understand Jesus and Matthew's Gospel within the interpretive frames offered us by late-antique, or even modern synagogues or churches, i.e., by what is best termed "religious institutions," these characteristic features of Jesus' religio-political vision of and campaign for the salvation of Israel and the world would easily be lost.

Now, while the public synagogues in which Jesus is portrayed as proclaiming his message is key for our understanding of the Jewish world of Matthew's narrative, we also have, uniquely among the Gospels, references in Matthew to a separate institution, within which followers of Jesus run daily business and administer judgment: the *ekklēsia* (Matt 16:18; 18:17). How should we understand this institution in relation to Jewish society? Why is such an institution necessary? Does it indicate a break with "Judaism"? The answers to such questions lie embedded in first-century Jewish understandings of purity, forgiveness, and salvation.

3.2 The *Ekklēsia*: Holiness and Purity Through Forgiveness

If we understand the public synagogues in this story as battlefields on which Jesus and his followers struggle with local scribal leaders to save the people of Israel as the kingdom advances through the land, the Matthean association synagogue, the *ekklēsia*, represents the model for what Jewish communal life should be as people prepare for the final

²⁶ This does not mean, however, that Matthew and the Qumran sectarians would envision the same fate for those who opposed them. For Matthew, victory comes when enemies are prayed for (Matt 5:44-47) and persuaded to join them (e.g., Matt 28:18-20) during a time when Jesus' followers endure apocalyptic hardships as they await and try to embody the coming kingdom (Matt 24:7-14). For the sectarians, on the other hand, victory is envisioned as materialising when enemies, "the sons of darkness" (identified as both other, non-sectarian, Jews and non-Jews) are destroyed in an eschatological war (note the Rule of the Community [1QS], the Rule of the Congregation [1QSa], the Damascus Document [D], and the War Scroll [1QM]).

²⁷ Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9-13. Note that, contrary to Mark and Luke, Matthew does not report exorcisms in synagogues, although healing is, at this time, closely related to a world of ideas in which illness is a physical sign of the power of evil forces. On illness and disability as connected with the work of demons and cured through exorcisms in Matthew, as well as such incidents' relationship to the coming of God's kingdom, see Matt 12:22-28.

judgment and the full realisation of the kingdom that will follow. But what exactly is the nature of this association?

As with other associations, such as the Qumran sectarians, the Matthean eschatologically oriented *ekklēsia* provides a separate institutional setting for its members, in which they form and make decisions about their own communal life. This institution has its own “judicial system,” which is independent of the praxis of the courts housed in the public synagogues; it exists beyond public civic ideology and represents practices founded on interpretations of Jewish law that have been agreed upon within the group itself.²⁸ The “alternative civic ideology” and the community rule that was formulated based on it allowed this messianic group to punish with exclusion members who broke the rules.²⁹

The rules of the *ekklēsia* are described briefly and selectively in Matthew’s 18th chapter, but the full picture emerges only when the narrative is read in its entirety. In order to describe the nature and function of the Matthean *ekklēsia* and its rules for exclusion we need to first understand the dynamics of holy and profane, of pure and impure, in the Gospel. These concepts and the narrative reality that they create lie at the heart of Matthew’s Gospel. As we shall see, while there are many studies of the “ethics” of, e.g., the Sermon on the Mount, or Matthew’s Gospel as a whole, labelling what we see in Matthew “ethics” may lead the twenty-first-century reader astray. Instead, we should approach the narrative and its rules through the lens of ritual and, most importantly, moral impurity. We shall begin with the problem of holiness.

In Matthew’s narrative, the only place and the only institution explicitly described as holy are the city of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem temple and its altar.³⁰ Before Matthew’s twenty-third chapter, the temple cult, which can only be carried out in this holy place, is considered valid and must be protected from defilement.³¹ Defilement, for Matthew, comes primarily from moral impurity, since ritual purity is considered worthless if the weightier matters of the law, that is, the moral commandments, are neglected.³² This is noted explicitly several times in the Gospel, most clearly in Matt 15:18-20:

²⁸ Matt 16:19; 18:18.

²⁹ Matt 18:17. While Matthew’s Gospel cannot have functioned as a community rule (it is a different genre, presenting the life of Jesus in narrative form), we have an example of a community rule used in communities which most likely also used Matthew’s Gospel: the Didache. For a recent discussion of the Didache and its relationship to the Gospel of Matthew (and the Letter of James), see Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen Zangenberg, eds., *Matthew, James, and the Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008). See also Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2002). For the argument that the Didache should be understood as the community rule used in communities also using the Gospel of Matthew, see also Anders Runesson, “Building Matthean Communities: The Politics of Textualization,” in *Mark and Matthew. Comparative Readings I: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First-Century Setting(s)*, eds. Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 379-408.

³⁰ Regarding Jerusalem, see Matt 4:5; 23:16-17; 27:53. The temple’s holiness is noted in 24:15, and the sacred status of the altar is implied in 5:23-24, cf. 23:18-19. On the status of the Jerusalem temple in Matthew’s Gospel, see Daniel M. Gurtner, “Matthew’s Theology of the Temple and the ‘Parting of the Ways’: Christian Origins and the First Gospel,” in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, eds. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 128-153.

³¹ Matt 5:23-24.

³² Matt 23:23. See discussion in Anders Runesson, “Purity, Holiness, and the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew’s Narrative World,” in *Purity and Holiness in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, eds. Carl Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen Schuller (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 144-180.

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

In chapters 23-24, however, something happens, and here we find the centre of gravity in Matthew's message: the temple, which is holy, has been defiled by the leaders of the people.³³ The severity of the defilement – bloodshed, one of the worst sources of moral defilement in Jewish tradition, is mentioned explicitly as having taken place within the temple itself³⁴ – leads to God leaving the temple (cf. 23:38), just as God left the first temple before its destruction as described in Ezekiel 10–11. In Matthew, this happens in two steps. First, God's Messiah, Jesus, leaves for the Mount of Olives, which is also where Ezekiel had "God's Glory [*k'vod Adonay*]" stay after God left the first temple.³⁵ Second, the moment when the Messiah dies as a result of the cooperation between the high priests and the elders of Jerusalem on the one hand, and the Roman colonial powers on the other, the temple curtain is ripped apart, symbolising God's abandonment of the temple and its impending destruction: "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."³⁶

Matthew's theological logic, which is thoroughly embedded in Jewish tradition, thus develops as follows. God chose Israel and established the covenant with them in order to enable God's presence to be among the people. The Mosaic law, which includes the means of atonement provided by the temple cult, was given for this purpose, and a place, the Jerusalem temple, was set aside as holy enabling God to be present among the people. As long as God lives in the temple, the temple cannot be destroyed, but if the temple is defiled, for example by bloodshed, God cannot remain there since holiness cannot co-exist with impurity.³⁷ With the temple defiled and eventually destroyed (24:1-2), there remains no means of atonement and the Mosaic covenant breaks down; the law cannot function, in Second-Temple Judaism, in isolation from the means of atonement embedded within it.

This is precisely why Jesus has to die according to Matthew: to save his people from their sin,³⁸ by way of eschatologically restoring the Mosaic covenant through his sacrifice

³³ The people accused are here, unhistorically, identified as Pharisees and the scribes associated with them.

³⁴ Matt 23:29-36; note v. 35.

³⁵ Ezek 11:23.

³⁶ Matt 27:51. Cf. the prediction in Matt 23:38: "See, your house [i.e., the temple] is left to you, desolate." On the tearing of the temple curtain and its interpretation, including discussion of the temple veil in Second-Temple and Rabbinic literature, see Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁷ Cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 6.127, 300, where God leaves the temple before its destruction (cf. *A.J.* 10.165-167; *J.W.*, 2.254-257). On Josephus and purity, see Steve Mason, "Pollution and Purification in Josephus's Judean War," in *Purity and Holiness in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, eds. Carl Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen Schuller (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 181-207. Later, the rabbis combined bloodshed and hatred as they explained the destruction of the first and the second temple respectively; see *b. Yoma* 9b. This passage makes explicit that "baseless hatred" is equalled to the worst of sins: bloodshed, sexual immorality, and idolatry. It should be noted that guilt for the destruction of the Temple is always sought, in the Hebrew Bible and Josephus, as well as in rabbinic literature and the New Testament Gospels, within the Jewish people. The (theological) reason for this is that if someone else, such as the Romans, would be accused, their god(s), by implication, would have to be judged stronger than the God of Israel, who would then have been shown to lack the power needed to defend his own abode. By blaming the Jewish leadership (the Gospels), or Jewish "bandits" (Josephus), the Romans are transformed into a tool in the hand of the God of Israel as he punishes his people. This strengthens the view that the Gospels were written by Jews from an inner-Jewish perspective, even if they were meant to be read also by a non-Jewish audience.

³⁸ Matt 1:21.

(i.e., his death, described as a voluntary sacrificial offering), which brings atonement, as reported in the passage of the Last Supper.³⁹ Jesus' sacrifice is thus necessary for the people of Israel to survive the apocalyptic end-time suffering and the final judgment.⁴⁰ Since the time of the patristic authors until today, Christian thinkers have often construed the destruction of the temple as God's punishment for the death of Jesus. From Matthew's perspective, however, it is the other way around: Because the temple will be destroyed, based on the fact that it has already been defiled (Matt 23:37-24:2), Jesus has to sacrifice himself to save his people.⁴¹

None of this means that Jerusalem and the temple have ceased to be holy for Matthew. The temple has been defiled, yes, but this view in fact requires that the defiled space has a remaining quality that distinguishes it from all other space; the temple after Matthew's twenty-third chapter does not represent ordinary profane space, but defiled holy space, and as such it is unfit for God's presence. But, if Jesus' sacrifice is understood as restoring the Mosaic covenant and saving God's people, where then, if not in the defiled and soon-to-be-destroyed temple, is God's presence to reside? This is where the *ekklēsia*, with its centre in Galilee (28:10), emerges in the narrative as a key institution for the Jewish people until the final judgment, since the community that gathers around Jesus now comes to represent the holy space where the resurrected Jesus, in a manner that is reminiscent of the *Shekhinah* dwelling among the people of Israel, can be present (Matt 18:20).⁴²

An important function of the *ekklēsia* is to provide access to a "space" where the divine may be approached once the temple has become defiled. This institution represents the place where true instruction in the Mosaic law and halakhah⁴³ is given among equals,⁴⁴ so that the people can avoid condemnation in the final judgment (cf. Matt 7:21). In the *ekklēsia*, most importantly, people will find access to the means of atonement⁴⁵ necessary for the law to function within the covenant. Since, however, the presence of the divine among the people requires purity, and the resurrected Jesus' presence among those who follow his guidance seems to be portrayed as being on par with that of the *shekhinah*, this

³⁹ Matt 26:26-28.

⁴⁰ Cf. Matt 24:1-36.

⁴¹ This also means that those who are blamed for the fall of the temple, i.e., the Pharisees and the scribes associated with them, are, in the narrative, the real reason why Jesus has to die, and so they turn into the Matthean Jesus' worst enemies. (The portrayal of the Pharisees in the other Gospels, esp. in Luke, is much more varied, with both positive and negative examples described. Indeed, in Luke 13:31, we even find Pharisees trying to save Jesus' life when Herod Antipas wants to kill him.)

⁴² The interpretive dynamics in Matthew are similar, thus, to those that are found in the Dead Sea Scroll; the sectarians, too, construed their community as sacred space functioning as a substitute for what they understood as a non-functioning Jerusalem temple. Paul, too, speaks of followers of Jesus as temple space; cf. n. 51 below.

⁴³ Matt 16:19; 18:18. In terms of interpretation of Mosaic law, much of the Gospel is dedicated to this theme. Overall instruction is, paradigmatically, given in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), and we get a summary of the law and the prophets in Matt 7:12. That Moses and the prophets would support Jesus' authoritative interpretation of the law is clarified in Matt 17:3 (where Elijah represents the Prophets). Various examples of Jesus' specific halakhic decisions are given throughout the narrative (e.g., 19:3-9, 17-19; 23:16-23) and the hermeneutical core which should guide all interpretation of Torah and form the foundation for halakhic decisions is explicated in Matt 22:36-40, referring to Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18.

⁴⁴ Matt 23:8-12. Note that this instruction is given not only to the disciples but to the Jewish "crowds" (*hoi ochloi*) too (23:1). In Matthew, there is no distinct boundary between the disciples and the crowds, the latter representing the majority of the Jewish people, excluding the leadership groups. This reinforces the point made above, that Jesus' followers were active in public Jewish society not only around Jesus' time in the 30s, but also as late as when the Gospel was authored in the late first century.

⁴⁵ I.e., Jesus' sacrifice, re-enacted as a ritual meal; Matt 26:26-28.

means that purity will be required for the members of the *ekklēsia* in order for the resurrected to be present among them. This last point needs some elaboration.

As has been noted above, Matthew's narrative emphasises that purity must first and foremost be defined as moral purity (e.g., Matt 15:18-20). This in turn means that to uphold a state of purity, forgiveness⁴⁶ becomes crucial, since no person can produce perfect obedience to the law in this regard and "perfection" is required.⁴⁷ We see this interpretive dynamic already in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus protects the holiness of the temple by ruling that a person who has committed a sin against someone else has to reconcile with that person before approaching the altar; once reconciliation is in place, sacrifices are acceptable and can be offered. Forgiveness and reconciliation between people neutralises, as it were, the defilement that attaches to the person who sins and allows the person to approach the holy.⁴⁸ The removal of moral impurity requires, thus, a two-step procedure, one involving fellow human beings, and one in which the divine is approached. For the latter to be possible the former must have been accomplished (cf. Matt 6:12, 14-15), since one cannot approach the divine in a state of (moral) defilement. Without forgiveness and reconciliation between humans, then, God cannot dwell among the people.

This theological logic is applied to the *ekklēsia*, as the "space" where the resurrected promises to be present, in Matthew 18. Here, as the community rule is exemplified through a focus on its exclusion mechanism, we learn that a person who refuses to ask for forgiveness must be excluded from the *ekklēsia* and be regarded as a non-Jew (*ethnikos*) or a tax collector; that is, as people either understood to be outside the covenant based on their ethnic identity (and the inappropriate behaviour that for Matthew is associated with the nations),⁴⁹ or as Jews who fail to live up to the standards of the kingdom through their cooperation with those who contribute to the oppression of the common people (Matt 18:17). Both of these categories of people represent what it means to be (morally) impure. The boundary of the community is thus drawn sharply where forgiveness ends, and this preserves the (moral) purity of its members, allowing Jesus' presence in their midst (Matt 18:20). The message is further reinforced as Jesus instructs the foundational figure of the *ekklēsia*, Peter, to forgive indefinitely anyone who asks for forgiveness (Matt 18:21-35).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ On forgiveness as understood in antiquity, see the recent studies by David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Charles L. Griswold and David Konstan, eds., *Ancient Forgiveness: Classical, Judaic, and Christian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴⁷ Note Matt 5:48, which sums up a section of halakhic rulings: "Be perfect [*teleios*], therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The connection between perfection and holiness is implied in the allusion Lev 19:2. On perfection, see also Matt 19:21.

⁴⁸ See discussion in Runesson, "Purity, Holiness, and the Kingdom of Heaven," 169-171. See also Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, forthcoming).

⁴⁹ According to Matthew, non-Jews represent, when generalised, everything that a good Jew should avoid (e.g., Matt 5:47; 6:7; 19:25-26). The positive portrayal of some individual non-Jews (e.g., Matt 2:1-12; 8:5-13; 15:21-28) are exceptions, functioning primarily as rhetorical tools to shame those within the Jewish people who do not accept that Jesus is inaugurating the kingdom. These non-Jewish characters also provide an opportunity for Matthew to reinforce that the proper attitude of non-Jews in relation to the Jewish Messiah is subordination; when they accept the power of the Messiah they will receive a share of the blessings of the kingdom, even as non-Jews.

⁵⁰ Cf. 6:12, 14-15. Without inter-human forgiveness there will be no reconciliation between God and people. It should be added that if someone refuses to forgive, and thus binds the other person in his or her sin, there is still a way out for that person. In such cases, Jesus himself steps in and extends, vicariously, forgiveness to the repentant sinner. See discussion of this aspect of Matthew's theology of forgiveness, illustrated by the story in Matt 9:1-8, in Runesson, "Purity, Holiness, and the Kingdom of Heaven," 171. The fate of the unforgiving party is, however, irreversible: condemnation (cf. Matt 18:34-35).

Once the nature and function of the *ekklēsia* is understood as a community, an institution, providing holy “space” as the eschaton and its related liberation is fast approaching – protecting its members as the Israelites were once protected in Egypt by the blood of a lamb when God’s wrath was unleashed against Pharaoh – the importance of forgiveness between its members emerges as a logical extension of a Jewish theology of the sacred. Just as with the sectarians at Qumran, but with a very different understanding of the end-time requirements, the Matthean association, the *ekklēsia*, aims at gathering a reformed and pure Israel, prepared for the coming judgment.⁵¹ Its members anticipate a restored Israel in a recreated world, which is headed by their messiah and the twelve apostles, representing the twelve tribes.⁵² In this world, which will also consist of non-Jews who have joined them,⁵³ “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”⁵⁴

4. Conclusion: Understanding Matthew as a Jewish Text

Understanding Matthew’s Narrative from the perspective of the institutional settings it describes results in a sharper focus on the Jewish nature of the world of the text. The Matthean Jesus and his followers are described as passionately engaging the public Jewish society of which they themselves are a part, and their message emerges, within these religio-civic institutions, as politically charged. Jesus and his disciples are presented as initiating a mass movement which aims at the liberation of the people of Israel through acting as tools of God’s Spirit, wrestling religio-political power from the hands of the scribal elite in public synagogues and the chief priests and the elders in the Jerusalem temple.

This scenario, I would argue, closely resembles what we should expect to find in a reconstruction of the historical Jesus. But Matthew adds to this depiction of the early movement a fierce critique of a specific group, the Pharisees, which had no official power in public Jewish society, neither in the synagogues nor in the temple. I have argued elsewhere, referring to insights not least from the social sciences, that this curious narrative situation, unique among the Gospels, can be explained if we reconstruct the group producing the Gospel as involved in a parting of the ways process within a larger Pharisaic association.⁵⁵ In the world of the text, we see the followers of Jesus interacting in

⁵¹ Note also how Paul construes his *ekklēsiai* as sacred (temple) space, imagery which implies the necessity of purity. See e.g., 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16. Paul, too, demands that people who are (morally) impure must be excluded from the community (e.g., 1 Cor 5:11-13; cf. 6:9-11). For discussion of purity in Paul’s writings, see Cecilia Wassen, “Do you have to be Pure in a Metaphorical Temple? Sanctuary Metaphors and Construction of Sacred Space in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Paul’s Letters,” in *Purity and Holiness in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, eds. Carl Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen Schuller (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 55-86. The temple as the presence of God among the people, and thus among the community of Christ-believers, is emphasised in 2 Cor 6:16-7:1.

⁵² Matt 19:28.

⁵³ Cf. Matt 28:18-20.

⁵⁴ Matt 13:43.

⁵⁵ Anders Runesson, “Re-Thinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict,” *JBL* 127:1 (2008): 95-132. Note that the Pharisees is the only Jewish group mentioned in the sources as giving birth to Christ-believers. Paul may be the most well-known example, as he is portrayed in Acts as combining a Pharisaic identity with his identity as a follower of Jesus (Acts 23:6). Of course, we also have the Pharisaic Christ-believers mentioned in Acts 15:5, whose view on the circumcision of non-Jews who wanted to join the Jesus movement was rejected by the leaders of the movement in Jerusalem.

public Jewish society but also as founding a new association, the *ekklēsia*; the latter process in no way interferes with the former, and does not lead to, as in the case with the Sectarrians by the Dead Sea, a withdrawal from society and other Jewish groups. The Pharisees in Matthew are attacked as a group existing on the same social level as the *ekklēsia*, also interacting with other Jews in public settings. The Jesus movement is portrayed as aiming to win over to their side the crowds, having them joining the *ekklēsia* and in this way, through proper teaching of law and the provision of a mechanism of atonement, saving the people from condemnation in the final judgment (cf. Matt 1:21).

Within this institutional setting, which foreshadows the coming kingdom and establishes what is required of the people if they are to enter life in the restored Israel where God will be present, (moral) purity is crucial since the resurrected will be among them as they await and prepare for the end (cf. Matt 1:23; 18:20). As Eyal Regev has noted, ideas and practices related to the concept of moral purity lies at the heart of what developed into Christian ethics.⁵⁶ I would add that using the word “ethics” when discussing the Gospel of Matthew, and, as is so common, the Sermon on the Mount, leads us astray since it makes us think of ideas and behaviour as detached from the realm of cultic practices and concepts. In Matthew, as in other forms of first-century Judaism, what we tend to label as cult and ethics were inextricably intertwined due to the purity concerns that exist at the centre of both, concerns whose aim it was to enable the God of Israel to dwell among the people.

While Matthew’s Gospel is included in the Christian canon and we therefore tend to think about this text as “Christian,” such a designation is, arguably, a misnomer. What developed into the phenomenon we know as mainstream “Christianity” is a form of non-Jewish religion that did not exist in the first century. A historical reading of Matthew’s Gospel should lead to, in my opinion, designating this text as a first-century Jewish text, regardless of its later reception; after all, few would call the texts included in the Hebrew Bible “Christian” despite the fact that they were appropriated by Christianity and made part of the Christian canon. The institutional and theological dynamics of Matthew function well when read within first-century Jewish socio-theological and cultic logic, but collapse when read in late-antique Christian settings.

Such historical results may cause some anxiety among modern mainstream Christian and Jewish communities, since they tend to blur the boundaries that were established between these religions in late antiquity, and which have since, by and large, remained in place. The historian’s task is, however, not to confirm later normative developments but to search for voices and landscapes that have been lost. These voices may not always suit our contemporary narratives and claims – they may even challenge them – but the hermeneutical burden of making them useful today, regardless of what we mean by useful, lies, after all, not with the ancients but with us. We must resist, as historians, the temptation to colonise the past with our own perspectives, which in the end can do little more than serve our own identity needs. Exploring Matthew’s narrative world as it prepares for the coming kingdom ideally should bring us closer to the historical “other.” This “otherness” that we encounter may contribute to putting ourselves and our identities in perspective and help us understand historical developments beyond normative narratives. In my opinion, this is not only a worthwhile historical exercise; it is also a

⁵⁶ Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity.”

hermeneutical exercise that may lead to a greater understanding of the contemporary world and the interaction between Jews and Christians within it.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASSB: Runesson, Anders, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson.

The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book.

Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity Series 72. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

ConBNT: Coniectanea biblica, New Testament

HTR: Harvard Theological Review

IEL: Israel Exploration Journal

JBL: Journal of Biblical Literature

NovT: Novum Testamentum

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ANTI-JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS OF HEBREWS: SOME NEGLECTED FACTORS

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ABSTRACT: Perhaps one of the most significant developments within contemporary Jewish Studies is the reclamation of the New Testament. The recovery of this particular part of Jewish history, however, has highlighted the problem of anti-Semitism that has for so long been associated with these documents. Although there is nothing as brazen as the Matthean “blood cry” (*Mt.* 27:25), or the Johannine denouncement of “the Jews” (e.g. *Jn.* 8:44), Hebrews is often placed among the most anti-Jewish texts of the New Testament. Key themes contributing to this perception are mainly found in the central section which paints Jesus as the eternal high priest, who offers the definitive means of atonement, and inaugurates the superior new covenant. On the other hand, it is often noted that this “radical supersessionism,” as it has been called, must be qualified by the author’s own Jewish identity and context, making charges of anti-Judaism, or even anti-Semitism, somewhat misleading, not to mention anachronistic. This paper revisits the anti-Jewish character of Hebrews in the light of recent developments in Jewish and New Testament Studies, showing how the classifications of this text as “anti-Jewish” are not as straightforward as many have supposed.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to complicate the anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews. As we shall see, by the Fourth Century CE the anti-Jewish interpretation of Hebrews was well-established, and is plain to see in Chrysostom’s influential commentary. While Chrysostom’s anti-Jewish rhetoric is of course condemned, many modern interpreters follow his lead (in various ways and degrees) in seeing Hebrews as an anti-Jewish text. Having reviewed a sample of these contributions individually, one from each of the last five decades, we shall then discuss four factors that they all fail to assimilate adequately, and that further complicate the anti-Jewish interpretation of Hebrews.

Is Hebrews Anti-Jewish?

For many interpreters, past and present, the answer to this question is obvious and affirmative. Naturally, there are many factors behind, in, and in front of, the text that influence this judgment, but for our present purposes I shall focus on the text in its ancient context. The most regularly identified anti-Jewish statements in Hebrews are as follows.¹

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¹ All translations are my own, unless noted otherwise.

Therefore, if God's ultimate objective had been accomplished (τελείως) through the Levitical priesthood – on the basis of which the people were legally bound – what need would there have been to speak about another priest arising in the order of Melchizedek [*Ps.* 110:4], and not in the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, it is necessary to change the law also ... For, on the one hand, a former commandment is being set aside (ἀθέτης), because it is weak (ἀσθενές) and ineffective (ἀνωφελές) – for the law brought nothing to completion – but, on the other hand, a better hope is brought in alongside, through which we are drawing near to God. (7:11–12, 18–19)

The Levitical priests worship in a shadowy example (ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ) of that which is in the heavens, for when Moses was about to construct the tabernacle he was told to “pay attention” and to “make everything according to the design shown to you on the mountain” [*Ex.* 25:8–9]; but now Jesus has obtained a superior ministry, insofar as he is a mediator of a better covenant, which is legislated upon better promises. For if the first one had been faultless (ἄμempτος) a place would not have been sought for a second one ... By speaking about a new covenant [*Jer.* 31:31–34], God made the first one old, and that which is old and aging is near to vanishing (ἐν τῷ λέγειν καινὴν πεπαλαίωκεν τὴν πρώτην· τὸ δὲ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ). (8:5–7, 13)

Since the law has a shadow (σκιά) of the good things to come, not the actual reality of these things, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, complete those who approach ... When he says “you did not want and were not pleased with sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings” – which are offered according to law – and then says “here I am to do your will” [*Ps.* 40:7–9], he takes away the first in order to establish the second (ἀναιρεῖ τὸ πρῶτον ἵνα τὸ δεύτερον στήσῃ). (10:1, 8–9)

Unlike some English translations, I have endeavoured to avoid augmenting the anti-Jewish potential of these verses, but it nevertheless remains clear that assessments of Hebrews as a “discourse of anti-Judaism,”² as one recent author put it, are not without basis. In fact, this perspective is the predominant one and has a long lineage. It was well-established by the Fourth Century CE, as Chrysostom's *Homilies on Hebrews*, the earliest comprehensive commentary on Hebrews to have reached us, indicates.

Our high priest is on high, and is much better than those Jewish priests, not only in this way, but also with regard to place, tabernacle, covenant, and person ... it is good then for those who have this great priest to be superior, and for the difference between us and the Jews to be as great as that between Christ and Aaron. Therefore, consider that we have an offering on high, a priest on high, a sacrifice on high. So let us offer sacrifices that can be brought to that altar, not sheep and cows, not blood and burning fat, all these things have been abandoned (ἀλείνται), and replaced (ἀντισταθέντα) with the rational form of worship.³

By saying “according to the order of Melchizedek” [*Heb.* 7:11], he expels (ἐξέβαλεν) the order of Aaron ... He became a priest, he says, not according to the law of a carnal commandment (σαρκικῆς ἐντολῆς) [*Heb.* 7:16], for in many ways that law was really no law (ἄνομος), and he spoke well when he called it a carnal commandment, for all things were limited to the carnal

² A. M. Bibliowicz, *Jews and Gentiles in the Early Jesus Movement: An Unintended Journey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 131.

³ John Chrysostom, *Homily 11*; J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca*, 161 vols. (Paris: Migne, 1857-86) 63, 92. Henceforth *PG*.

(σαρκικά), as it says, circumcise the flesh (σάρκα), anoint the flesh, wash the flesh, purify the flesh, shave the flesh, fasten on the flesh, take care of the flesh, laze in the flesh ... He says that “the previous commandment has been set aside (ἀθετήσις), because it was weak (ἀσθενής) and ineffective (ἀνοφέλεις)” [Heb. 7:18] ...What is this “setting aside”? A substitution (ἄμειψις), and a throwing-away (ἐκβολή) ... for the law perfected nothing, all were types, everything was a shadow, be it circumcision, sacrifice, or Sabbath.⁴

Similarly, there are a number of references to Hebrews in Chrysostom’s notorious *Orations Against the Jews*, or *Orations Against Judaizing Christians*, since his primary targets are those among his own congregation who were observing Jewish customs (keeping the Sabbath, attending the synagogue, and participating in the various fasts, feasts, and festivals).⁵ In his seventh speech, for example, he describes the fasts, feasts, and festivals of the Jews as abominations that are contrary to the purposes of God, claiming that the entire Jewish commonwealth (Ἰουδαϊκὴ πολιτεία) is over, and that the Jewish way of life is illegal (παρانونόμος). Among the “proofs” for these suppositions are numerous references to the central section of Hebrews, a text which he describes as a severe blow (πληγὴ) to the Jews in that it demonstrates the futility (ἀτελής) of their commonwealth and God’s rejection (ἀπόσπαστο) of it in favour of the new way inaugurated by Christ.⁶

In the hands of Chrysostom Hebrews is a radical statement of wholesale supersessionism in which Jews and Judaism have been discarded, and replaced with Christians and Christianity. As far as Chrysostom was concerned, there was a firm boundary between Judaism and Christianity, and any blurring of this boundary was regarded as a grievous sin. Given that Chrysostom had to preach his *Orations Against Judaizing Christians* at all suggests that a significant portion of his congregation did not take his anti-Jewish views very seriously, but such anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews quickly became commonplace, and remained unchallenged until very recently.

In the wake of the Shoah, as interest in the problem of anti-Semitism increased, many have turned to the specific problem of anti-Semitism in the New Testament. As Lloyd Gaston’s memorable summary goes, “A Christian church with an anti-Semitic New Testament is abominable, but a Christian church without a New Testament is inconceivable.”⁷ It is hard to imagine anyone denying the presence of at least some kind of anti-Semitism in the Church Fathers. As we have just observed, there can be no doubt about Chrysostom’s anti-Jewish rhetoric. Neither can there be any doubt about his *use* of New Testament texts to this end. The question is the extent to which, if at all, such invective can be found in the New Testament itself. In the remainder of this paper I shall outline some of the contours of this ongoing discussion as it relates to Hebrews by focussing on five studies, one from each of the last five decades. The first three (Ruether, Gager, and Wilson) are chosen because they belong to major studies of Christian anti-Semitism that have since become well known and influential. The other two are chosen because one (Kim) is the first (and currently only) full-length analysis of the issue in Hebrews, and the other (Bibliowicz), written from a Jewish perspective, is the most recent.

⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homily* 13; PG 63, 103-105.

⁵ P. W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1979).

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Adversus Iudaeos* 7; PG 48, 915-928.

⁷ L. Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 15.

1. Rosemary Ruether's "Faith and Fratricide"

In Rosemary Ruether's influential book, *Faith and Fratricide*, she argues that the *adversus Judaeos* traditions of the Church Fathers are rooted in the earliest form of Christianity.⁸ For Ruether, anti-Judaic thought is the "left hand" of Christology, as she famously put it, and is embedded in the New Testament itself. With regard to Hebrews, she maintains that Chrysostom was simply following Hebrews' lead,⁹ and she understands Hebrews itself as a fusion of spiritualizing and eschatological exegesis in which ...

Judaism is not merely superseded historically, but absolutely. It is the mere finite, mutable and carnal, in contrast to the eternal, immutable and spiritual ... The people who cling to this religion, and imagine thereby to win God's approval, belong to the heritage of apostasy.¹⁰

By asserting that the "author is a pastor addressing a Jewish Christian community, probably in Alexandria, which is in danger of backsliding into Judaism,"¹¹ she is in tune with the traditional, and still widespread, paradigm for interpreting Hebrews, which is at least as old as Chrysostom.¹² Thus, she is in broad agreement with Chrysostom's interpretation of Hebrews, which, along with the rest of the anti-Jewish arguments of the New Testament and the Church Fathers, she argues led to the tragic history of the Jews in Christendom, and formed the foundation for political and social anti-Semitism.

Ruether's book makes a powerful point, and rightly called for a new consciousness among Christians that acknowledges and questions its anti-Jewish history and theology. Although she has certainly identified a key issue in Jewish-Christian relations, it is doubtful that Christology can bear the weight that she has placed upon it. After all, the first people to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah were Jews, and in the years following Ruether's book it has been demonstrated that many of the exalted claims about Jesus in the New Testament documents have an essentially Jewish character, and likely emerged from a Jewish context.¹³ Christology can of course operate in an anti-Jewish manner, as Ruether has demonstrated, but it is premature to imagine such a sharp distinction between Jews and Christians in the New Testament, and it is misleading to identify this single issue as *the* point of contention between them. Ruether seems to acknowledge this latter point with regard to Hebrews when she notes that "the real concerns of the christological exegesis of Hebrews center on the temple cultus."¹⁴ The essential continuity that she sees between Chrysostom and Hebrews is a question to which we shall return.¹⁵

⁸ R. R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 158-159, 164.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107, 110.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹² Although Chrysostom believed the destination to be "Jerusalem and Palestine" (PG 63, 11).

¹³ E.g. A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), L. W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (2nd ed., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2nd ed., London: SCM Press, 1989); A. Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); D. Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 109.

¹⁵ See also A. T. Davies, ed., *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

2. John Gager's "Origins of Anti-Semitism"

Another attempt at tracing the origins of anti-Semitism is that of John Gager.¹⁶ Gager begins by noting that the discussion of "anti-Semitism" has been hampered by confusing and ill-defined terminology, which he seeks to clarify. He retains the term "anti-Semitism" to denote "hostile statements about Jews and Judaism on the part of Gentiles," explaining that such statements are expressed by uninformed outsiders, and bear some resemblance to what we call anti-Semitism today. This is distinguished from the early Christian hostilities, for which he adopts the term "anti-Judaism," which is a variegated "matter of religious and theological disagreement."¹⁷ In tracing the role of Christianity in the origins of anti-Semitism, Gager maintains that the early intra-Christian debates over the presence and extent of Judaism in Christianity produced a body of literature that was selectively preserved in accordance with the anti-Jewish tendencies of the eventual victors, and subsequently interpreted in anti-Jewish ways. Gager focuses his discussion on Paul (whom he distinguishes from his later anti-Jewish commentators) but also accommodates some passing reflections on Hebrews.

Like Ruether, Gager understands Hebrews as an essentially anti-Jewish text. He asserts, for example, that Hebrews "reflects the general preoccupation of Christian-writers in the late first century with demonstrating the absolute superiority of Christianity over Judaism," and describes it as an "extended polemic" against "involvement in Jewish beliefs and practices."¹⁸ Although he remains agnostic over whether the addressees are Jewish-Christians tempted to return to Judaism, or Gentile Christian Judaizers, he believes that "it offers the most sustained and systematic case against Judaizing to be found anywhere in Christian literature of the first century."¹⁹ Unlike Ruether, however, he makes an important distinction. Gager rightly observes that "Hebrews says nothing at all about the Jews as such and shows no inclination to identify the recipients of the new covenant as Gentiles," and goes on to conclude that "the target of the polemic is Judaism per se rather than the Jews as a people."²⁰ Although it is debateable just how helpful this distinction is, at least it shows some effort to appreciate what the text *does* and *does not* say. Nevertheless, while rejecting the specific charge of *anti-Semitism* on behalf of Hebrews, he is clear that it belongs to the anti-Jewish wing of Christian literature, akin to Barnabas and Ignatius, and "well on the way to Marcion."²¹

3. Stephen Wilson's "Related Strangers"

Similarly, in his survey of Jewish-Christian relations from 70–170 C.E., Stephen Wilson also concludes that Hebrews is a severe example of anti-Judaism, although he is somewhat

¹⁶ J. G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8; cf. D. R. A. Hare, "The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in *Antisemitism*, ed. Davies, 28–32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181, 182.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

²¹ *Ibid.*

more confident about its exclusively Gentile background.²² Wilson argues that, like Barnabas, Hebrews sets forth a radical statement of supersession in which Christians have replaced the Jews as the new people of God.²³ According to Wilson, the theology of Hebrews “routinely and starkly contrasts Christianity and Judaism to the detriment of the latter”; although certain heroes from Israel’s past are portrayed positively, “Israel is castigated and superseded.”²⁴ Wilson believes that this radical supersessionism was provoked by Gentile Judaizers who set the author on a course of intra-Christian self-definition over and against Judaism.²⁵ In view of this, it might be argued that the supersessionism of Hebrews is merely a by-product of Christian self-assertion, and is in no way anti-Jewish,²⁶ but Wilson rejects such attempts to minimise the anti-Jewish attitudes expressed in Hebrews, maintaining that the author knew exactly what he was doing, and that his “gratuitous denigration” of Judaism “takes up as much space as the more positive assertions,” suggesting that Judaism “was an immediate threat.”²⁷ Neither is he convinced by those who argue that there is no polemic against Judaism in Hebrews because it is not Jews, but Christians who are addressed.²⁸ In response, Wilson rightly notes that there is no reason to restrict the categories of “polemic” and “anti-Judaism” to situations of head-on conflict since “they can appear in an entirely Christian environment.”²⁹

In his review of Wilson’s book, which is generally very positive, Neusner notes a gaping flaw,³⁰ namely, that despite acknowledging the great diversity among Jews and Christians, and the extraordinary range and complexity of Jewish-Christian relations, Wilson often speaks about Jews and Christians as if they were two well-defined groups, and Judaism and Christianity as if they were two well-defined religions.³¹ This is also evident throughout his discussion of Hebrews which repeatedly asserts a sharp contrast between two coherent abstractions that did not exist at this time, with Jews and Judaism, on the one hand, and Christians and Christianity on the other. Although his interpretation of specific details might (or might not) be correct, the extent to which Wilson’s discernment of a “radical supersessionism” depends upon these abstractions has a direct bearing on the extent to which his reconstruction unravels.

One area in which this seems to unravel concerns the author’s characterization of his group as the “descendants of Abraham” (*Heb* 2:16), which Wilson asserts, without argument, means that “they are Christians, not Jews.”³² As Wilson is perfectly aware, these categories are not mutually exclusive, yet this seems to be the assumption guiding the distinction, as if “Christian” was synonymous with “Gentile.” More importantly, however, Hebrews provides no basis for interpreting this phrase typologically as a reference to Christian Gentiles, as Paul does in Galatians, for example. The author of Hebrews consistently treats Abraham as a historical individual, so when he refers in passing to his

²² S. G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70-170 C.E.* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995).

²³ *Ibid.*, 110-142.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 117, 119.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 123-127.

²⁶ E.g. E. Grässer, “Der Hebräerbrief 1938-1963,” *TR* 30 (1964), 149.

²⁷ Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 122.

²⁸ E.g. G. Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 54-55.

²⁹ Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 122.

³⁰ J. Neusner, “Judaism and Christianity in the Beginning: Time for a Category-Reformation?,” *BBR* 8 (1998), 229-237.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 234-237.

³² Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 118.

brothers as the “seed of Abraham” (σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ), it naturally bears its ordinary meaning, and seems to mark the specifically Jewish identity of these particular followers of Jesus (cf. *Is.* 41:8–10; *Ps. Sol.* 9:9; 18:3; *3 Macc.* 6:3; *2 Cor.* 11:22).³³ As the ascription “to the Hebrews” (from the late Second Century onwards) suggests, and as most scholars maintain, they regarded themselves as part of the same house as Moses (*Heb* 3:1–6), that is, the house of Israel (8:8–10), and direct descendents of the Patriarchs and the Prophets (1:1; 7:4; 11:2).³⁴ Although certainty is out of the question, on balance, the addressees are most likely somewhere within the spectrum of ancient Jewish society.

4. Lloyd Kim’s “Polemic in the Book of Hebrews”

The first monograph length study to tackle the anti-Jewish character of Hebrews is Lloyd Kim’s *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews*.³⁵ In this book Kim offers a socio-rhetorical analysis of Hebrews and begins by reconstructing the social context of the author of Hebrews and its recipients. Kim maintains that the community behind Hebrews is a Jewish-Christian sect “distinguished from and marginalized by the dominant Jewish society,” and that the author is engaged in a form of counter-cultural rhetoric that seeks to legitimize his community over and against the dominant form of Judaism.³⁶ The core of Kim’s study is an attempt to examine the meaning and function of the author’s polemic against the Levitical priesthood (7:1–19), the Mosaic covenant (8:1–13), and Levitical sacrifices (10:1–10), in light of the larger context of late Second Temple Judaism, and to determine whether Hebrews itself is anti-Semitic, anti-Judaic, or supersessionistic.

In short, Kim concludes that these institutions played an important role in the life and identity of the Jewish people, and that the criticisms in Hebrews signal a radical discontinuity with the Judaism of the day.

The author was seeking to persuade those who were tempted to revert back to Judaism to remain faithful to his community, while strengthening and confirming the commitment of those who did remain. His polemic against the Levitical priesthood and law, Mosaic covenant, and Levitical sacrifices functions to legitimize his community and further distinguish it from the dominant Jewish society.³⁷

Kim notes that although there is much ancient intra-Jewish denigration with which the polemic in Hebrews may be compared, Hebrews goes further in criticizing the sacred institutions themselves, whereas others merely criticize the *abuses* of these institutions. Kim also argues that this radical discontinuity is balanced by an essential continuity in that the author retains the history and legacy of Israel, bases his Jewish arguments on the Jewish

³³ See C. P. Anderson, “Who are the Heirs of the New Age in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. Louis Martyn*, eds. J. Marcus and M. L. Soards (JSNTSup 24; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 255–277.

³⁴ E.g. G. L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012), 19–23; P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), 21–27.

³⁵ L. Kim, *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism, Supersessionism?* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17–61.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

Scriptures, and is writing about new Jewish institutions that are the eschatological culmination of old Jewish institutions for the benefit of the Jewish people. Like Gager and others, Kim distinguishes between “anti-Semitism” and “anti-Judaism,” and, noting its nineteenth-century origins and ethnic and racial contours, rejects the former term as an adequate description of Hebrews. He emphasizes that Hebrews addresses theological differences among Jews, and concludes that “the polemical passages in Hebrews do not promote hatred of the Jews, nor do they advocate the destruction of the Jewish people.”³⁸ Kim does regard Hebrews as “anti-Judaic,” however, “in the sense that it speaks of the fulfilment of the Levitical priesthood and law, the Mosaic covenant, and the Levitical sacrifices,” and talks of a “qualified supersessionism,” explaining that the “author is not arguing for the abandonment by God of the Jewish people, but rather for the abandonment of the shadowy means by which God’s people draw near to him.”³⁹

This is a well-conceived contribution which definitely advances the discussion, although, in my opinion, there are a number of points where it could be nuanced a little more carefully. First, as a *socio-rhetorical* interpretation Kim’s analysis relies heavily upon a reconstruction of the social context behind the text,⁴⁰ a hazardous task at the best of times, but especially in the case of Hebrews. This is not simply because there is so little information about the social context given in the text itself,⁴¹ but because Hebrews is largely preoccupied with *heavenly* and *future* realities, all of which are expressed with *scriptural* vocabulary and imagery. It is interesting to note just how many of the factors involved in Kim’s reconstruction of the social context of Hebrews are inextricably caught up with the exegesis, mysticism, and eschatology of Hebrews.⁴² While it is difficult to interpret Hebrews without at least some idea of its immediate social context, one should be aware that the reconstruction of social realities from the text of Hebrews risks transforming that which the author regarded as the world to come into the world behind the text. This criticism could of course be applied to all the studies discussed here, and more besides, but it is particularly acute in a socio-rhetorical analysis.

Second, although Kim’s analysis of Second Temple Jewish literature recognizes the variety therein, this variety tends to be treated as a unity in the comparison with Hebrews, as if two things are being compared, when in fact multiple things are being compared. Moreover, although he gathers a healthy cross-section of texts on which to base his reconstruction of ancient Jewish thought, the basis on which they are selected is unclear, and one might query how an examination of the texts that are not included in Kim’s study (such as the Enoch literature for example) might nuance the picture further. Therefore, all statements about how alarming Hebrews would have sounded “to Jewish ears” or within “mainstream Judaism” may need to be nuanced a little more carefully to account for the variegated spectrum of ancient Jewish sensibilities.⁴³

³⁸ Ibid., 201.

³⁹ Ibid., 200, 201.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 17-61 (approximately a quarter of the book).

⁴¹ A point well made by Pamela Eisenbaum, “Locating Hebrews within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins,” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods - New Insights*, ed. G. Gelardini (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 213-237.

⁴² Kim, *Polemic*, 49-52.

⁴³ Ibid., 47, 81, 122, 180, 199.

Third, Kim simply assumes a pre-70 date for Hebrews, and takes it for granted that the audience have access to an operational Levitical cultus.⁴⁴ Kim provides no explanation as to why he prefers a pre-70 date over an equally possible post-70 date, even though it has a direct bearing on the meaning and significance of the polemic in Hebrews. As Mark Nanos explains,

It seems to me that the Levitical priestly service is no longer available to the author and addressees ... they are unable to avail themselves of its sacrificial services for sins, and therefore they are experiencing insecurity. If so, then the language pointing to a superior way to achieve this outcome through the faith of/in Christ Jesus can be understood as one Jewish group's way of dealing with a matter that the former covenantal arrangements no longer offered to them ... But if partaking of that system is still open to them and they are being told to abandon it as bankrupt because there is now a new and better way that makes that covenantal behaviour obsolete or counter-faithful, then it would seem to represent a new religious movement.⁴⁵

A post-70 reading of Hebrews, therefore, casts its comments in a somewhat different light, but Kim neglects to examine this. Rather than interpreting Hebrews as a radical rejection of something dear to the Jewish people that distinguishes it from Judaism, it might be interpreted as a message of encouragement to those distressed by the loss of the Levitical cultus; a reassurance that God has provided another way to live in covenantal faithfulness that renders the Levitical system superfluous.⁴⁶ It is still radical, but, like *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and *3 Baruch*, it could be located within the spectrum of Jewish responses to the sack of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple.

5. Abel Bibliowicz's "*Jews and Gentiles in the Early Jesus Movement*"

To my knowledge, the most recent analysis of anti-Jewish attitudes in Hebrews is that of Abel Bibliowicz who mostly reiterates Stephen Wilson's position, albeit with an extra emphasis on the exclusively Christian and Gentile parameters of the author's situation.⁴⁷ Bibliowicz stresses that "there is nothing in the epistle that necessitates the assertion that the author's concerns, adversaries, audience, or horizon are outside the Jesus movement,"⁴⁸ and argues that Hebrews reflects "a debate among Gentile believers in Jesus about continuity-discontinuity vis-à-vis the founding fathers."⁴⁹ Thus, according to Bibliowicz, "the author does not aim at Judaism per se,"⁵⁰ the "apostasy" in question is not an attraction to "external-mainstream Judaism," but to the beliefs and traditions of Jesus' first followers, and that "from among all the New Testament writers, Hebrews moves

⁴⁴ E.g. "The author's polemic against the Old Testament sacrifices functions to dissuade his readers from participating in them" (*ibid.*, 189).

⁴⁵ M. D. Nanos, "New or Renewed Covenantalism? A Response to Richard Hays," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, eds. R. Bauckham *et al.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009), 185.

⁴⁶ E.g. M. E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (JSNTSup 73; Sheffield: JSOT/Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

⁴⁷ Bibliowicz, *Jews and Gentiles*, 115-137.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 134. Gager asserts the exact opposite (see above).

furthest in the direction of a breach with the traditions of Jesus's companions."⁵¹ Like Wilson, Bibliowicz maintains that the intra-Christian nature of the conflict in no way alleviates its anti-Jewish rhetoric, and describes Hebrews as "the cornerstone of supersession theology," a "discourse of anti-Judaism" that is "highly abusive to Jewish sensibilities."⁵²

Overall, Bibliowicz's book serves as a valuable reminder of the anti-Jewish character, and anti-Semitic potential, of much Christian theology, culture, and lore, but unfortunately his analysis of Hebrews offers little grist for the mill. That the author's horizon is within the Jesus movement is not in dispute, and it is unclear what difference it really makes to stress that he is arguing against the Jewish traditions of *Jesus' first followers*, rather than simply asserting, like the other studies we have discussed, that he is arguing against Jewish traditions, traditions that were of course observed by Jesus and his first followers, but also by the rest of Jewish society, in various ways and degrees. Bibliowicz's emphasis of this point may suggest that he is drawing too sharp a distinction between the variegated Jesus movement and the variegated Judaism of which it was a part. Neither does he appreciate the distinctions developed by Gager and Kim, but simply forces Hebrews into his meta-narrative of a "Pauline-Lukan" or "proto-orthodox" faction, stating that from "Hebrews onward Pauline-Lukan Gentiles perceived themselves as replacing 'the Jews' as YHWH's chosen."⁵³ In the end, Bibliowicz's examination of Hebrews largely restates Stephen Wilson's assessment, and fails to engage with the most significant contributions from the last decade or so.⁵⁴

Some Neglected Factors

Significantly, each of the five studies reviewed above agrees that Hebrews is anti-Jewish. Although the extent and nature of its anti-Judaism and supersessionism are variously conceived, like Chrysostom, they regard Hebrews as a radical blow to the heart of Judaism. We have already begun to note some of the individual limitations and weaknesses in these proposals, all of which serve to complicate their anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews. The remainder of this paper will discuss a further four factors that they all fail to assimilate adequately or neglect altogether.

Multiple Ways, Fuzzy and Fused

The idea of a single, early, and decisive separation between the two "religions" of "Judaism" and "Christianity" has been fought, and overcome, on many fronts.⁵⁵ Although we may encounter various localized, isolated, and literary incidents of separation and

⁵¹ Ibid., 129.

⁵² Ibid., 137, 131, 134.

⁵³ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁴ E.g. Kim, *Polemic*; Gelardini, ed., *Hebrews*; Bauckham et al., eds., *Epistle to the Hebrews*.

⁵⁵ E.g. A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); cf. H. Shanks, ed., *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two* (Washington D.C.: BAS, 2013).

opposition between “Jews” and “Christians,” it is doubtful that we can speak very much of two distinct ways prior to Rome’s patronage of the Church.⁵⁶ As Jacob Neusner succinctly puts it, “Judaism and Christianity as they would live together in the West met together for the first time in the fourth century.”⁵⁷ It is highly dubious, therefore, when Chrysostom appeals to a three-hundred year old text in support of a recent, and still emerging, division between Judaism and Christianity. Similarly, it is equally dubious when Ruether imagines the author to be asserting “an absolute line” between Judaism and Christianity,⁵⁸ or when Gager declares that Hebrews is preoccupied “with demonstrating the absolute superiority of Christianity over Judaism.”⁵⁹ Such assumptions are anachronistic with respect to Hebrews, and have led to hasty conclusions regarding the place of Hebrews in relation to the Judaism of the day.

As we now know, first-century Judaism was a complex affair, leading some to speak about *Judaisms* rather than Judaism.⁶⁰ Although the usefulness of the plural is debateable, its use effectively illustrates the fallacy that ancient Judaism was some kind of rigid structure that flowed seamlessly into the rabbinic era. As Seth Schwartz notes, “it is difficult to imagine any serious scholar ever again describing the Judaism of the later Second Temple period as a rigorous, monolithic orthodoxy, as was still common only a generation ago.”⁶¹ Although he rejects the characterization of ancient Judaism as multiple, Schwartz takes it for granted that it “was complex, capacious, and rather frayed at the edges,” and observes the “messiness, diversity, and unpredictability” that might ensue within a coherent ideology of “the one God, the one Torah, and the one Temple.”⁶² In spite of the great diversity, however, many scholars maintain that it is still possible to speak of a “common Judaism,”⁶³ based on certain distinguishing characteristics that unite the various strands. Martin Goodman, for instance, suggests that Rabbi Yohanan’s estimate of twenty-five types of Judaism prior to the destruction of the Temple (*j. Sanh.* 29c) is “just about right,” but nevertheless rejects the view that there was no common core in late Second Temple Judaism, explaining that “All pious Jews shared at least the beliefs that they worshipped the God whose Temple was in Jerusalem and that they had a common history in which a covenant between God and Israel was enshrined in the Torah, which all Jews knew they had to observe.”⁶⁴ Although it may be misguided to insist on any single feature as essential to the Judaism of the period,⁶⁵ the following four themes, identified by Ed

⁵⁶ P. Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways*, ed. J. D. G. Dunn (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992), 1-25; J. Lieu, “‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?,” *JSTNT* 56 (1994), 101-119.

⁵⁷ J. Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ix.

⁵⁸ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 111.

⁵⁹ Gager, *Origins*, 181.

⁶⁰ E.g. J. Neusner, W. S. Green, and E. S. Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁶¹ S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4-5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 9, 49.

⁶³ E.g. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (Corrected ed., London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1994); G. Stemberger, “Was There a ‘Mainstream Judaism’ in the Late Second Temple Period?,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 4.2 (2001), 189-207; W. O. McCready and A. Reinhartz, eds., *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2008).

⁶⁴ M. Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 46, 34 n. 3.

⁶⁵ J. Z. Smith, “Fences and Neighbours: Some Contours of Early Judaism,” in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ed. W. S. Greed, vol. 2 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980), 1-25.

Sanders as common to the “vast majority of Jews in the ancient world,” provide a solid enough basis for determining these distinguishing characteristics.

- (1) Belief in and worship of the God of Israel;
- (2) Acceptance of the Jewish Scriptures as revealing his will;
- (3) Obedience to at least some aspects of the Mosaic Law;
- (4) Identification with the history and fate of the Jewish people.⁶⁶

These themes could be unpacked further of course, but are sufficient to say that, despite the veritable consensus regarding the immense diversity within Second Temple Judaism, it seems that we may also, at the very least, speak of “a shifting cluster of characteristics” that would have identified the various groups and sects as Jewish.⁶⁷

The same could be said of the early Jesus movement of course, a model of “interactive diversity” (*pace* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.32.8),⁶⁸ yet united by its focus on Jesus of Nazareth, but when we encounter the New Testament documents, it has not always been appreciated that we are often dealing with further varieties of ancient *Jewish* literature that are just as much a part of Jewish history, as they are Christian history, as the recent reclamation of the New Testament within Jewish Studies acknowledges.⁶⁹ Thus, rather than approaching these documents from the perspective of two “parted ways,” which is to pre-judge the evidence anachronistically, it is more appropriate to start with “multiple ways, fuzzy and fused” as an interpretative paradigm, and situate the variegated Jesus movement of the First Century within the equally variegated Judaism of the late Second Temple period. What we have in the First Century is a number of connected currents, all fiercely debating the interpretation of Torah.⁷⁰

With regard to Hebrews then, a document emerging sometime between 60 and 100 CE among “descendents of Abraham” (*Heb* 2:16; see above), which presupposes the authority of the Jewish Scriptures and the God of Israel, it is probably more appropriate to approach Hebrews as an example of the diverse literature of Hellenistic Judaism.

From this perspective, and from the perspective of its author, Hebrews is a piece of ancient Jewish literature that *bears witness to* and *argues fiercely for* a particular form of ancient Judaism. Therefore, all talk of Hebrews as a Christian homily against “(re)lapsing” into Judaism (so Ruether, Gager, Wilson, and Kim)⁷¹ is misguided and misleading. When Hebrews first emerged, the world at large was predisposed to judge it as Jewish literature. Within Jewish society, the reception of Hebrews would no doubt have been as diverse as the Judaism from which it emerged. Unfortunately, we do not know how Hebrews was initially received – we know how it was subsequently received, in a Gentile Church that defined itself in increasingly anti-Jewish ways – but it is probably safe to speculate that it

⁶⁶ E. P. Sanders, “Common Judaism Explored,” in *Common Judaism*, eds. McCready and Reinhartz, 18.

⁶⁷ Smith, “Fences and Neighbours,” 1-25.

⁶⁸ L. Hurtado, “Interactive Diversity: A Model of Christian Origins,” *JTS* 64.2 (2013), 445-462.

⁶⁹ E.g. A.-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷⁰ See L. T. Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” *JBL* 108.3 (1989), 419-441.

⁷¹ Since he specifically rejects this framing of the issues, it would be unfair to include Bibliowicz here. Bibliowicz emphasizes that Hebrews is arguing against Gentile attraction to another form of *Christianity*, the Jewish form, but, unless we locate this form of Christianity outside Judaism, something that Bibliowicz does not seem to be advocating, there is no substantial difference between this reconstruction and Wilson’s.

was mixed. Perhaps some would have regarded it as apostasy (cf. *Acts* 6:8–8:3; 21:21) or “highly abusive,”⁷² but this does not necessarily situate Hebrews outside the Judaism of the day, for it was not uncommon for fellow Jews to strongly disagree, and even violently reject each other (e.g. *Ps. Sol.* 4; 1QS II 4–10; Josephus, *J.W.* 6:99–111; *Ant.* 11:340; *m. Nidd.* 4:1–2; 7:4–5; *m. R. Sh.* 2:1–2; *m. Shebi.* 8:10).⁷³ As Paula Fredriksen notes:

Intolerance of its own diversity characterizes late Second Temple Judaism, and accounts for much of its sectarian literary production. The intra-group vituperation and intense debate about authority, behaviour, and biblical interpretation that marks canonical and extra-canonical paleo-Christian texts (Paul’s letters, the gospels, Barnabas [perhaps], Revelation) are some of the most Jewish things about them.⁷⁴

Although she does not specifically mention Hebrews, her consideration of Barnabas suggests that it would be included in a more comprehensive list. The anti-Jewish interpretation of Hebrews then, seems to have been facilitated, at least in part, by an *a priori* and anachronistic judgment on the nature of Judaism and Christianity at the time of composition, and on Hebrews as firmly rooted in the latter in contradistinction to the former. Anti-Jewish interpretations are almost inevitable from such a standpoint. Recent developments in Jewish Studies and New Testament Studies, however, suggest a more historically credible standpoint for interpreting first-century “Christian” texts, namely, from the perspective of a diverse and complex Second Temple Judaism in which the two ways of Judaism and Christianity had not yet emerged, let alone parted. From this point of view, anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews garner less momentum, and cease to be so inevitable.

The Specificity of the Criticisms

Another area of neglect in the anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews is the failure to assimilate the specificity of the author’s criticisms. Since the time of Chrysostom it has typically been supposed that the author of Hebrews was mounting an argument for the wholesale abrogation of Judaism in favour of Christianity. Aside from the implicit anachronisms in such proposals, discussed above, there is also reason to question the alleged extent of the author’s polemic. Although Chrysostom’s criticisms of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices are somewhat starker than those found in Hebrews, at least such criticisms are found in Hebrews (7:11–19; 10:1–10). When Chrysostom universalizes this note of criticism, however, to include Jewish laws and rituals that are *not* criticized in Hebrews, we have reason to question his interpretation.

In Hebrews 7:13–17, for example, the author addresses the problem posed to Jesus’ priesthood by his descent from Judah, for “with respect to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests” (7:14). Therefore, the author of Hebrews notes, Jesus became a priest “not according to a law regulating physical descent (οὐ κατὰ νόμον ἐντολῆς σαρκίνης)” (7:16), but

⁷² Bibliowicz, *Jews and Gentiles*, 134.

⁷³ See Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander,” 434–441.

⁷⁴ P. Fredriksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways?’” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, eds. Becker and Reed, 62 n. 86.

on the basis of his resurrection and heavenly ascent, which situates him in the priesthood of Melchizedek.⁷⁵ In the hands of Chrysostom, however, the scope of Hebrews 7:16 is considerably enlarged. According to Chrysostom, when the author of Hebrews said “not according to a law of a carnal commandment (οὐ κατὰ νόμον σαρκικῆς ἐντολῆς),” he spoke well, for the law was really no law, and was only concerned with carnal things such as circumcision, purification, Sabbath observance etc.⁷⁶

Two things stand out from Chrysostom’s use of this text. First, he uses a partial synonym, writing σαρκικῆς instead of σαρκίνης. This may simply be a result of the text before him since there is some marginal manuscript support for σαρκικῆς, but the use of this term introduces a nuance that is not present in σαρκίνης, and certainly not present in Hebrews 7:16. The essential difference between σάρκινος and σαρκικός is “fleshy” and “fleshly”; the former denotes that which *pertains* to the flesh or physical body, whereas the latter denotes that which is *characterized* by the flesh, and is open to more derogatory connotations. The difference is subtle, and not always observed, but in this instance it is appropriately represented in translation by using the terms “physical” and “carnal.” Second, the author of Hebrews *defines* the law in question as a specific commandment concerning the hereditary determination of priests, and, *out of respect for that law*, develops the notion of a heavenly priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. Chrysostom, on the other hand, *characterizes* the law itself as essentially carnal, and includes a whole host of Jewish laws, customs, and rituals that are not mentioned in Hebrews, some of which may even be implicitly endorsed in Hebrews (see below). Chrysostom’s interpretation of Hebrews as a comprehensive condemnation of the entire Jewish πολιτεία is clearer still in his *Orations Against the Jews*, as we have seen above.

The tendency to universalize the polemic in Hebrews is also present in modern works, as the five studies discussed above illustrate. Bibliowicz, for instance, claims that “Hebrews deploys a mostly self-referential argument about the inferiority of the beliefs and traditions of the descendents of the founding fathers that encompasses *all aspects of Jewish life*.”⁷⁷ According to Wilson, the “clear and unambiguous judgment” of Hebrews is that “*Judaism* is defunct, because it has been surpassed,”⁷⁸ and both Gager and Ruether speak in terms of the “absolute” abrogation of Judaism in Hebrews.⁷⁹ The clumsy way in which this assessment is often asserted can be seen by Gager’s and Ruether’s use of Hebrews 10:1. According to Ruether, this verse teaches that the “Torah is only a shadow of the good things to come, not the true form of these things,”⁸⁰ whereas Gager seems to take it as a reference to “the old covenant, which was never more than a shadow of the good things to come.”⁸¹ However, the law (not the covenant) is indeed the subject of the sentence, but it is described as *having* (ἔχων) a shadow (not *being* a shadow) of the good things to come, and, as the immediate context makes plain, that shadow is the Levitical cultus.⁸² Indeed, one

⁷⁵ See D. M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NovTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011); J. A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT II/331; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

⁷⁶ The relevant passage is given above.

⁷⁷ Bibliowicz, *Jews and Gentiles*, 135 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 122-123 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁹ Gager, *Origins*, 181; Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 107.

⁸⁰ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 108.

⁸¹ Gager, *Origins*, 183.

⁸² See B. C. Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ and the Law: The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews 7:1-10:18* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 244-254.

might argue that the entirety of the author's polemic is in fact focussed on the Levitical cultus.

In a recent article by Richard Hays this is precisely what he claims. Contrary to his earlier opinion of Hebrews as "relentlessly supersessionist," Hays declares that "such assessments are too often grounded in a superficial reading of the evidence" and "are not based on any serious exegesis of the text itself."⁸³ Instead, Hays proposes that the teaching of Hebrews is better described as a form of "Jewish sectarian New Covenantalism." In the course of his analysis, Hays concludes that

the letter to the Hebrews nowhere speaks of Jews and Gentiles, nowhere gives evidence of controversies over circumcision or food laws, criticizes nothing in the Mosaic Torah except for the Levitical sacrificial cult, and contains no polemic against Jews or Jewish leaders ... When the old covenant is contrasted unfavourably to the new, the specific deficiency of the old is described exclusively in terms of the ancient sacrificial cult as a means of atonement for sins.⁸⁴

The specificity of the author's criticisms, and concomitant absence of a comprehensive supersessionism, is a point well made, and one with which his respondents, Oskar Skarsaune and Mark Nanos, concur.⁸⁵ Nanos pushes the point further still, noting that even this specific criticism is tempered by the author's attribution of the Levitical cultus to God's design (e.g. *Heb* 8:5).⁸⁶

Of the five studies discussed in the previous section, Lloyd Kim's is by far the most attentive to the specificity of the author's criticisms, but, in addition to the Levitical cultus, he maintains that the author's polemic also encompasses the Mosaic Law and Covenant. Like other aspects of Kim's study, however, this may also need to be nuanced a little more carefully. First, in the process of examining priesthood (*Heb* 7:11–19) and sacrifice (*Heb* 10:8–9), Kim offers some passing comments about the law.⁸⁷ Although he accepts that the references to the law are specifically dealing with the Levitical cultus, Kim notes that it may be a modern imposition to divide the ethical elements of the law from the cultic, and that by criticizing a part of the law, the author may be implicating the whole law. While it is true that Hebrews provides no basis for a distinction between ethical and cultic parts of the law, this is quite different from acknowledging the specificity of the author's criticisms. The former is imposed upon the text, whereas the latter emerges from the text, as Kim admits. Although Kim's *speculation* about the *possible implications* of the author's comments may be valid, it remains inconclusive, and is no basis for including the law among the targets of the author's polemic.

Second, Kim devotes an entire chapter to the significance of the Mosaic covenant in Second Temple Judaism, and the socio-rhetorical function of Hebrews 8:1–13 in the light of it. Kim's argument for the widespread importance of the Mosaic covenant in ancient Jewish society goes without saying, so when the author of Hebrews describes it as

⁸³ R. B. Hays, "'Here We Have No Lasting City': New Covenantalism in Hebrews," in *Epistle to the Hebrews*, eds. R. Bauckham *et al.*, 151.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 154, 165; cf. Anderson, "Who Are the Heirs," 255–277.

⁸⁵ O. Skarsaune, "Does the Letter to the Hebrews Articulate a Supersessionist Theology? A Response to Richard Hays," in *Epistle to the Hebrews*, eds. R. Bauckham *et al.*, 175, 180; Nanos, "New or Renewed," 184, 186–187.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Kim, *Polemic*, 87–88, 186–187.

“obsolete,” “growing old,” and “close to nullification” (8:13),⁸⁸ it is fair to assert that it would have “sounded alarming to Jewish ears,” and been “devastating” to a Jewish community.⁸⁹ It is significant, however, that Kim does not examine Hebrews 9, which limits this covenant language to the Levitical cultus. Taken in isolation, Hebrews 8:13 certainly sounds like the radically discontinuous statement that most take it to be, but this needs to be nuanced in light of the author’s focus upon the “cultic regulations” of the first covenant (9:1–10), and the fact that the new covenant is enacted by Jesus’ *atonement sacrifice* (9:11–17), and mediated on the basis of his heavenly high *priesthood* (7:20–22; 8:1–6).

Thus, according to Hebrews, that which is “old” or “obsolete” in the Mosaic covenant is the earthly Levitical cultus, something that may already have been inferred from the destruction of the Temple,⁹⁰ and that which is “new” in the new covenant is the atoning sacrifice and high priesthood of Jesus in the heavenly Melchizedekian cultus. The use of new covenant language is effective in driving home the significance of the sectarian innovations, but, in view of the author’s specific concern with the Levitical cultus, it is inappropriate to construe the new covenant in Hebrews as a replacement of God’s covenant with Israel. Despite the radical nature of the innovations, the new covenant is still understood in terms of God’s covenant with Israel. Like the Mosaic covenant (e.g. *Ex.* 6:3), the author’s new covenant ideology does indeed envisage a change in God’s relationship with his people, but, also like the Mosaic covenant, it is a continuation and development of that same basic relationship. Nanos may be closer to the mark, therefore, when he describes the author’s presentation as “*Renewed Covenantalism*,” and suggests that the covenant is “*continued but augmented to be made effective in a new way or to a new degree*.”⁹¹ The use of new covenant language to conceptualize an eschatological Jewish sect in *continuity* with the ancestral covenant is illustrated by the *Damascus Document* and Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g. CD-A VIII:16–21; 1QpHab II), and, in this respect, is perhaps more comparable to the new covenant language in Hebrews than Kim allows.⁹²

The Eschatology of the Innovations

The author of Hebrews clearly believed that a definitive atonement for sins had been made once and for all, and that the eschatological age had begun (e.g. *Heb* 1:2–3; 9:26). Moreover, in contrast to at least one school of ancient Jewish thought (e.g. *Deut.* 30:12; *Ps.* 115:16; *3 Macc.* 2:15; Josephus, *Ant.* 3:181), it is maintained that the heavenly realm, wherein the eschatological innovations are actualized, is presently accessible. This is evident not only from the fact that Jesus is thought to have ascended there (*Heb* 4:14; 8:1–2; 9:11–12), but that Jesus the “forerunner” (πρόδρομος) has ascended there “for us” (6:19–20). The term “forerunner” denotes one who undergoes an experience in advance of others in order to show the way, and suggests that the prospect of heavenly ascent is presently available for all the faithful followers of Jesus. This seems to be confirmed by the author’s exhortations to pursue the heavenly sanctuary and throne of God (4:16; 10:19–

⁸⁸ Kim’s translation (ibid., 137).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 122.

⁹⁰ Cf. Eisenbaum, “Locating,” 226.

⁹¹ Nanos, “*New or Renewed*,” 185 (emphasis his).

⁹² Kim, *Polemic*, 110–117.

22), and the assertion that the addressees are those who have come to the heavenly Jerusalem and communed with angels (12:22–24), all of which is reminiscent of ancient Jewish mysticism.⁹³ This “realized eschatology” is a major emphasis of Hebrews and undergirds much of the author’s innovations and criticisms. Although it pushes Hebrews towards the edges of ancient Judaism, the analogous Jewish apocalyptic and mystical traditions suggest that it need not breach those boundaries (e.g. *I Enoch*, 4Q400–407), a consideration that is often underappreciated in the anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews.⁹⁴ In this section, however, I shall highlight the impact that Hebrews’ *futuristic* eschatology has on anti-Jewish interpretations.

In addition to the strong theme of realized eschatology in Hebrews, there is also clear evidence of a futuristic eschatology, references to *expectations* that are *not yet* fulfilled. For example, despite the present mystical entry into the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22–24), the people behind Hebrews are looking forward to “the city to come” (13:14); despite visions of their high priest resting in glory (1:3–13; cf. 2:9; 12:24), this is qualified as a revelation of “the world to come” (2:5). When the author composed his message, the faithful followers of Jesus were “eagerly awaiting” his second coming and salvation (9:28), and Jesus was understood to be waiting for his enemies to become a footstool for his feet (10:13). Thus, although the author stresses that which is realized, like other New Testament documents, we observe an “eschatological ambiguity” in Hebrews in which the eschatological age is partly fulfilled yet incomplete.⁹⁵ Although the eschatological age had begun, and the world to come could be accessed, mystically, in heaven, the author of Hebrews was still waiting for that long-expected “Day of the Lord” of traditional Jewish eschatology.

As Hays notes, this “open-ended eschatology” places the people behind Hebrews within Israel’s “ongoing and unfinished story,” and tempers the supersessionist interpretations by recognizing the “provisional character” of their new understanding.⁹⁶ Similarly, Nanos observes that the very existence of this “word of exhortation” (13:22) suggests that the new covenant has not yet been experienced.

Those who experience Jer. 31 do not need to have their “faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14). They do not need to be taught; this kind of letter does not need to be written to them; they just know what needs to be known ... Exhortation will itself be finished when that day arrives, according to the text of Jeremiah – and Hebrews. So it cannot have arrived, one might logically deduce.⁹⁷

⁹³ See Barnard, *Mysticism of Hebrews*; J. A. Barnard, “Ronald Williamson and the background of Hebrews,” *The Expository Times* 124.10 (2013), 469–479; S. D. Mackie, “Ancient Jewish Mystical Motifs in Hebrews’ Theology of Access and Entry Exhortations,” *NTS* 58 (2012), 88–104; S. D. Mackie, “Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *JTS* 62 (2011), 77–117; C. Rowland and C. R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (CRINT 12; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

⁹⁴ For the suggestion that Hebrews bears witness to an early “Christian” expression of Jewish apocalyptic mysticism, see Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews*.

⁹⁵ See S. D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT II/223; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

⁹⁶ Hays, “New Covenantalism,” 162–163.

⁹⁷ Nanos “*New or Renewed*,” 186–187.

Since the author of Hebrews believes that the new covenant has arrived, Nanos finds his argument illogical and incoherent,⁹⁸ but perhaps this “incoherence” may be explained with reference to the eschatological ambiguity of Hebrews. It would seem that the vision of the new covenant as described by Jeremiah and quoted in *Heb* 8:8–12 was only partially realized at the time of writing, and primarily pertained to the atoning effects of Jesus’ sacrificial offering. As we have noted above, the principal import of the covenant language concerns priestly sacrifices, a focus that is reiterated when the author repeats what he regards as the most significant portion of Jeremiah’s “new covenant” text.

For by a single offering he [Jesus] has completed forever those who are being sanctified. The holy spirit also testifies to us, for after he said “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws upon their hearts, and inscribe them upon their mind” [*Jer.* 31:33; *Heb* 8:10], he says, “their sins and lawless deeds I shall remember no more [*Jer.* 31:34; *Heb* 8:12].” When there is a remission of these things then, there is no longer an offering for sins. (*Heb* 10:14–18)

As both the immediate literary context, and the way in which this quotation is introduced, show, the author’s primary concern is with the remission of sins. The first part of the quotation not only serves to locate the text, but also to specifically highlight the atoning features of the new covenant. In other words, the realized aspect of the new covenant is the complete remission of sins, but the time when Torah is written on the heart, and everyone knows the Lord without being taught, is not yet experienced, but rather, anticipated. It appears to be anticipated soon, and when it arrives the author expects that which is old to vanish (8:13), but that which is “*near* to vanishing (ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ),” as he puts it, has not yet vanished. For Hebrews then, although the former covenant is in the process of being absorbed, continued, and developed in the latter, both covenants are operational and neither covenant is fully functional.

It is far too simplistic, therefore, to characterize the new covenant of Hebrews in terms of a complete and definitive “voiding” and “replacing” of the Mosaic covenant, or even as a “fulfilment,” as many do. Bibliowicz, for example, in his comments on Hebrews 8, writes that Jeremiah 31

is subverted to support the advent of a new covenant with non-Israelites (8:8), the collapse of the “old” (8:9), and the superiority of the new (8:10–11) ... There is no room or reason for the first covenant to continue, once the second has been established. The emergence of the second or new covenant renders the first old, null, and void.⁹⁹

Aside from his assumption of an exclusively Gentile context, leading to the remarkable assertion that *Heb* 8:8 refers to non-Israelites, this understanding of the new covenant fails to assimilate the specificity and eschatology of the author’s comments. The new covenant is indeed regarded as superior (e.g. 8:6), but, as we have seen, it is also regarded as

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187; cf. A. J. M. Wedderburn, “Sawing Off the Branches: Theologizing Dangerously Ad Hebraeos,” *JTS* 56 (2005), 393–414.

⁹⁹ Bibliowicz, *Jews and Gentiles*, 124–125; cf. Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 122: “if the old covenant is recognized as foreshadowing the new, it is *only* a shadow or sketch, which is then comprehensively overtaken (8:5)” (emphasis his).

incomplete, and its present “updating” effect is far from comprehensive. According to Hebrews, the present functionality of the new covenant pertains to the messianic high priesthood and atoning sacrifice of Jesus, thereby bringing about a change – or solution, if Hebrews is responding to the absence of the Levitical cultus – with respect to priestly sacrifices. In other respects, there is plenty of room for the former covenantal arrangements and regulations to continue. Although the author *expected* further changes to take place, presumably when Jesus returns (9:28; 10:37–38), there is no basis for denying that in the meantime God’s covenant with Israel continued in the age-old way. Without explicit evidence to the contrary, and read within the parameters of late Second Temple Judaism, there is every reason to suppose that these “descendents of Abraham” (2:16) belonging to the “house of Moses” (3:5–6) were expected to maintain their covenantal faithfulness in accordance with the ancestral customs.

The Place of Jewish Practices

Whatever their conclusions regarding the anti-Jewish character of Hebrews, most scholars acknowledge at least some continuity between Hebrews and the Judaism of the day. The author’s use of the Jewish Scriptures, for instance, is one such area in which a substantial continuity is widely recognized.¹⁰⁰ The world of Hebrews is very much a scriptural world,¹⁰¹ and the numerous and extended quotations, expositions, and exegetical methods, securely situates it in the Jewish world.¹⁰² What is almost completely overlooked, however, is the place of Jewish practices in Hebrews. Hebrews does not discuss circumcision, Sabbath observance, or dietary laws, for example, the three practices that regularly characterize Jews in the ancient world.¹⁰³ The silence of Hebrews on these matters partly explains why they are overlooked in the secondary literature, but it does not justify the supposition that they were not important or had been rejected. If the people behind Hebrews are Jewish believers in Jesus, as seems most likely, then this silence can just as easily be understood as an acceptance of these basic Jewish practices. Although there is no unambiguous mention of circumcision, Sabbath observance, or dietary laws in Hebrews, there appears to be an acceptance of Jewish purification rituals (6:2; 10:22),¹⁰⁴ and, although it is usually understood as a rejection of Jewish dietary practices,¹⁰⁵ the reference to “foods” in *Heb* 13:9 could easily be a warning about the culinary habits of Gentiles (cf. *1 Macc.* 1:62–63; *Acts* 15:29; 21:25; *1 Cor.* 8:1–13; 10:14–33; *Rev.* 2:20), thereby indirectly endorsing a traditional Jewish diet. These possibilities are rarely, if ever, entertained in the anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews, but they at least serve to complicate, if not overturn, much of what is claimed in such portrayals.

¹⁰⁰ See G. Guthrie, “Hebrews’ Use of the Old Testament: Recent Trends in Research,” *CBR* 1.2 (2003), 271–294.

¹⁰¹ L. T. Johnson, “The Scriptural World of Hebrews,” *Int* 57 (2003), 237–250.

¹⁰² E. Tönges, “The Epistle to the Hebrews as a ‘Jesus Midrash,’” in *Hebrews*, ed. Gelardini, 89–105; S. E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation* (WUNT II/260; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

¹⁰³ See, for instance, P. Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁴ See Barnard, *Mysticism of Hebrews*, 194–202.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 116–17; Bibliowicz, *Jews*, 118–119.

One further Jewish practice that might be registered in Hebrews is that of synagogue attendance, to which we now turn. In *Heb* 10:24–25 the author urges his brothers to promote love and good deeds which is not done by neglecting their ἐπισυναγωγή but by encouraging one another. Ἐπισυναγωγή is an extremely rare word in the surviving literature. The term is used in a second-century BCE stele from the island of Symi to denote a “collection” or “sum” of money.¹⁰⁶ A similar usage is registered by Claudius Ptolemy, the second-century CE astronomer and mathematician, to denote a “calculation,” that is, a “collection” or “sum” of numbers (*Tetrabiblos* 1:20). Somewhat closer to its usage in Hebrews are the two other biblical references where it denotes an eschatological “gathering” of God’s people (*2 Macc.* 2:7; *2 Thess.* 2:1; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.24.5). Even though we have so few examples of this term, its basic sense is clear; it denotes some kind of “gathering together” or “assembly,” and is essentially synonymous with συναγωγή.¹⁰⁷ The addition of ἐπί perhaps clarifies that which is already implied by συναγωγή, namely, assembly *at* a particular location. The term finds a partial antonym in the Johannine ἀποσυναγωγος to denote someone sent *away* from the synagogue/assembly (*Jn.* 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

According to our earliest text of Hebrews (P⁴⁶ c. 200 CE), the prepositional prefix is dotted for deletion, an action that was apparently carried out by the original scribe.¹⁰⁸ This might bear witness to an early reading of *Heb* 10:25 as συναγωγή, or it could just be an example of the scribe’s apparent preference for simple words over compound words.¹⁰⁹ Either way, it illustrates the synonymy between ἐπισυναγωγή and συναγωγή in antiquity, albeit exhibiting a preference for the more common συναγωγή. Commentators are generally content to explain its use in Hebrews with reference to *2 Macc.* 2:7 and *2 Thess.* 2:1, noting the common eschatological thread between them. This overlooks the difference however. In Hebrews, ἐπισυναγωγή refers to a *present* practice, a regular and formal gathering that provides an opportunity for mutual edification, the importance of which is highlighted with respect to the nearness of the Day of the Lord. In *2 Maccabees* and *2 Thessalonians*, on the other hand, ἐπισυναγωγή refers to a single *future* event, the eschatological ingathering that shall take place on the Day of the Lord. Thus, the use of this rare term in Hebrews is not entirely comparable to other extant examples, but its similarity to its synonym συναγωγή, on the other hand, is striking, and it might provide another reference to an ancient synagogue service.

The recent surge in specialist synagogue studies has already served to dismantle long-held misconceptions about the origins, nature, and development of the synagogue, and, with the help of new archaeological discoveries and the use of new methods and perspectives, is facilitating a robust basis for a new consensus formation.¹¹⁰ Perhaps one of the most famous discoveries pertaining to the ancient synagogue is the Theodotos

¹⁰⁶ A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. L. R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 103.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ So J. R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 234, 318 n. 670.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, S. Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogues during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); A. Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001); L. I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (rev. ed., New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2005); A. Runesson, D. D. Binder, and B. Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 C.E. A Sourcebook* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

inscription, discovered in Jerusalem in 1913 by the French archaeologist Raimund Weill. Securely dated to the First Century CE, it provides a valuable snapshot of a Second Temple period synagogue in the Land of Israel.

Theodotos, son of Vettenu, priest and ruler of the synagogue [ἀρχισυνάγωγος], son of a ruler of the synagogue, grandson of a ruler of the synagogue, built the synagogue [συναγωγήν] for the reading of the law and the teaching of the commandments, and also the guest chamber and the upper rooms and the ritual pools of water for accommodating those needing them from abroad, which his fathers, the elders and Simonides founded.¹¹¹

Allowing for regional variations and developments, this inscription touches on a number of common features of ancient synagogues. They typically operated with some kind of leadership that was *not* dominated by the Pharisees; they were built for Torah-centred liturgical purposes but also accommodated various community activities, as indicated by the reference to the guest chamber and upper rooms, and provided some kind of means for ritual purification.¹¹²

The community functions of ancient synagogues are diverse. Among other things they could be used as lodgings (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 14:374), archives (e.g. Josephus, *J.W.* 2:291), treasuries (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 16:164; *Mt.* 6:2), and courts (Josephus, *Ant.* 14:235; *Mk.* 13:9; *Acts* 22:19; *m. Makk.* 3:12). Among the liturgical activities, the public reading of the Torah, particularly on the Sabbath, is “explicit in almost every type of source from the Second Temple period in Judea and in the Diaspora – in cities and in villages.”¹¹³ Acts is probably just about right, therefore, when James declares that “from ancient times, and in every city, Moses is proclaimed, for he is read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues (συναγωγαῖς)” (*Acts* 15:21; cf. 13:14–15; 17:1–2; *Lk.* 4:16; Philo, *Legat.* 156; *Prob.* 81–83; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2:175; *J.W.* 2:289–92; *m. Yom.* 7:1).

In addition to the reading of the Torah, we may be fairly confident that the Prophets were also often included (e.g. *Lk.* 4:17; *Acts* 13:15, 27; *m. Meg.* 4:1–5; *t. Meg.* 3:1–18), and that serious attention was given to teaching, expounding, and applying these sacred texts and traditions (e.g. Philo, *Somn.* 2:127; *Legat.* 156; *Hypoth.* 7:11–14; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2:175; *Lk.* 13:10; *Jn.* 6:59; *Acts* 13:15, 42; 4Q251 1:5). According to Levine, “the evidence shows that by the first century, a weekly ceremony featuring communal reading and study of sacred texts was a universal Jewish practice.”¹¹⁴ With all due respect to the variety within this unity, and the likelihood that there were also other activities associated with the ancient synagogue, such as prayer and praise,¹¹⁵ for example, it is beyond all reasonable doubt that synagogue attendance was one of the distinguishing characteristics of Jews living in the First Century CE. Therefore, there is every reason to suppose that Jesus-

¹¹¹ Runesson *et al.*, *Ancient Synagogue*, 53.

¹¹² See L. I. Levine, “‘Common Judaism’: The Contribution of the Ancient Synagogue,” in *Common Judaism*, eds. McCready and Reinhartz, 27–46.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 41; cf. L. H. Schiffman, “The Early History of the Public Reading of the Torah,” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, ed. S. Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 44–56.

¹¹⁴ L. I. Levine, “Common Judaism,” 42; cf. E. P. Sanders, “Common Judaism and the Synagogue in the First Century,” in *Jews*, ed. Fine, 1–17.

¹¹⁵ The notion that the synagogue was a place of Sabbath worship prior to the Third Century C. E. has been challenged recently (e.g. H. A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* [Leiden: Brill, 1994]). For a rebuttal, see P. W. van der Horst, “Was the Synagogue a Place of Sabbath Worship Before 70 CE?,” in *Jews*, ed. Fine, 18–43.

believing Jews would have participated in this “universal Jewish practice,” as the book of Acts suggests (e.g. 6:9; 9:20; 13:14; 16:13, 16; 22:19; 26:11), and to picture the *faithful* Jesus-believing Jews behind Hebrews as regular synagogue attendees, similar to those addressed in James (see *Jas.* 2:2).¹¹⁶ Although some were neglecting this practice, and had perhaps “parted ways,” the direct recipients of Hebrews were not, at least not yet, and the author urges them to remain faithful to the ἐπισυναγωγή.

Taking ἐπισυναγωγή in *Heb* 10:25 as a reference to a synagogue also coheres well with the activities that the author associates with it, namely, the promotion of love and good deeds, and mutual encouragement (10:24–25). The term used to denote “encouragement” (παρακλῶ) is the same term that is used to describe the speech that is Hebrews, a λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως, “message of encouragement/exhortation” (13:22), which provides an insight into the kind of “encouragement” that is expected at their ἐπισυναγωγή. One of the few areas in which scholarship on Hebrews has approached something of a consensus is with regard to genre. Although it concludes like an epistle, and was written down and sent like an epistle, it lacks certain epistolary conventions, such as an address, for example.¹¹⁷ Given the oral (e.g. 2:5; 8:1; 11:32), exegetical (e.g. 3:7–4:13; 8:7–10:18), and hortatory (e.g. 2:1–4; 4:14–16; 10:19–39) character of Hebrews, and in view of the author’s own description of his work as a “message of encouragement” (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως), a phrase used in Acts 13:15 to denote a synagogue homily (cf. 2 *Macc.* 15:11), Hebrews is typically classified as an example of an ancient Hellenistic Jewish/Christian sermon or homily.¹¹⁸ The account of Paul and his companions attending the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch gives us an idea of the kind of situation in which Hebrews could have been read (*Acts* 13:13–52). After the readings from the Torah and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders invite Paul and his companions to give a “message of encouragement (λόγος παρακλήσεως) to the people” (13:13–15; cf. *Rom.* 16:4), and it is at a juncture such as this that Hebrews was probably first intended. It has even been calculated that Hebrews was a synagogue homily specifically intended for the Ninth of Av, but this rests upon a particular interpretation of practices that are only attested in some rabbinic sources from a later period.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, in general terms, the liturgical activities in the synagogue on the Sabbath make excellent sense as an occasion for the delivery of this “exhortative speech.” When the author of Hebrews speaks about encouraging/exhorting one another in relation to the ἐπισυναγωγή (10:25), therefore, this could be his way of characterizing the various readings, expositions, and discussions of sacred texts that take place every Sabbath in the synagogue (e.g. Philo, *Hypoth.* 7:11–14; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2:175).

Similarly, the promotion of “love and good deeds” (*Heb* 10:24) also coheres well with the liturgical activities of ancient synagogues. In his treatise *Every Good Man is Free*, for example, Philo points to the Essenes as men of exemplary character (*Prob.* 75–91). Among

¹¹⁶ On the reference in James, see D. C. Allison Jr., *James: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 385–388.

¹¹⁷ See Deissmann, *Light*, 146–251 (243–244 on Hebrews); H. W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 13–14.

¹¹⁸ See L. Wills, “The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity,” *HTR* 77:3–4 (1984), 277–299; C. Clifton Black II, “The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon,” *HTR* 81:1 (1988), 1–18; H. Attridge, “Paraenesis in a Homily,” *Semeia* 50 (1990), 211–226; H.-F. Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 35–41; Tönges, “Epistle to the Hebrews,” 89–105.

¹¹⁹ G. Gelardini, “Hebrews, An Ancient Synagogue Homily for Tisha be-Av: its Function, its Basis, its Theological Interpretation,” in *Hebrews*, ed. Gelardini, 107–127; G. Gelardini, “*Verhärtet eure Herzen nicht*: Der Hebräer, eine Synagogenhomilie zu Tisha be-Av (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

other things, he refers to their synagogue activities, noting that they assemble on the Sabbath and listen carefully to the sacred books being read and expounded (81–82), and as a result,

They are trained in godliness, holiness, and righteousness, as well as practical and civic matters, acquiring understanding of things that are truly good, or bad, or neutral, and learning how to choose what they ought and flee from its opposite, taking as their defining standards the following three principles: love of God, love of virtue, and love of humanity. (*Prob.* 83; cf. *Spec.* 2:62–63; Josephus, *Ant.* 16:42–43)

By contrast, the author of Hebrews registers a complaint with his addressees, noting some “laziness” with respect to listening, and that although they ought to be teachers, they remain unskilled in righteousness, and untrained in their ability to distinguish between good and bad (*Heb* 5:11–14). One of the solutions to such immaturity is to pay attention to the provocation of love and good deeds, an activity that Philo and others associate with the synagogue, and which the author of Hebrews associates with the ἐπισυναγωγή (10:24–25).

It may also be significant that within the same sentence the author presupposes the importance of a “body washed in pure water” (λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ) (10:22),¹²⁰ which is probably a reference to the regular Jewish practice of ritual purification.¹²¹ If so, then this may be a further indication that the author’s reference to their ἐπισυναγωγή pertains to an ancient synagogue. As the Theodotos inscription illustrates, ancient synagogues were typically built with water facilities in close proximity; if there was no river (*Acts* 16:13), or sea (Josephus, *Ant.* 14:258) nearby then ritual immersion baths were constructed.¹²² This might indicate that Jews purified themselves before entering synagogues or it could simply be convenient, indicating that Jews regularly purified themselves, and regularly attended synagogue, without necessarily suggesting any connection between the two. According to Susan Haber’s careful analysis of the archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence, the former explanation may be applied to Diaspora Jews, who probably performed ritual ablutions such as hand washing and sprinkling before entering the synagogue. The latter explanation may be applied to Judeans, who regularly immersed themselves in order to maintain ritual purity, although, with the possible exception of Qumran,¹²³ probably not for the specific purpose of entering the synagogue.¹²⁴ In any case, two things seem clear, that “Jews purified themselves so that they could draw near to that which was holy,” and that “it seems probable that the early synagogue in the Diaspora and in the land of Israel was regarded, at least to some extent, as a sacred realm.”¹²⁵ The comment in *Heb* 10:22, therefore, could also be understood with reference to the synagogue, illustrating the close connection between purifying water

¹²⁰ Cf. *Lev.* 14:9; 15:11, 13, 16, 21, 27; 16:4, 24, 26, 28; 22:6; *Num.* 5:17; 19:7–8; *Deut.* 23:12; 11Q19 45:15–16; Philo, *Deus* 8; *Spec.* 1:261; Josephus, *J.W.* 2:129; *Ant.* 12:145; 14:285; *Mk.* 7:4; *Heb* 6:2; *Acts* 21:20–26.

¹²¹ See Barnard, *Mysticism of Hebrews*, 194–202.

¹²² See S. Haber, “Common Judaism, Common Synagogue? Purity, Holiness, and Sacred Space at the Turn of the Common Era,” in *Common Judaism*, eds. McCready and Reinhartz, 63–77; R. Reich, “Miqwa’ot (Jewish Ritual Immersion Baths) in Eretz-Israel in the Second Temple and the Mishnah and Talmud Periods” (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990) [Hebrew].

¹²³ See J. Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), 105–162; H. K. Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

¹²⁴ Haber, “Common Judaism,” 63–77.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 65, 76.

facilities and ancient synagogues (cf. CD-A 11:21–22; Philo, *Deus* 8; *Decal.* 45; Josephus, *J.W.* 2:129). Thus, just as many Jews in the late Second Temple period associate ritual purification, training in godliness, and scripturally-based education and exhortation, with the synagogue assemblies, so it would seem does the author of Hebrews, although he calls it an ἐπισυναγωγή.

If ancient “synagogues” were consistently denoted with the single term συναγωγή in the Greek literature, the fact that Hebrews refers to an ἐπισυναγωγή would be sufficient to suggest the kind of distinction that is typically taken for granted in the secondary literature. However, what is referred to in English as a “synagogue” went under a number of different names in ancient times. Συναγωγή and προσευχή are by far the most common, but we also find διδασκαλεῖον (Philo, *Legat.* 312), ἱερόν (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1:209), σαββατεῖον (Josephus, *Ant.* 16:164), συναγώγιον (Philo, *Legat.* 311), and τόπος (3 *Macc.* 3:29; 4:18; 7:20), for example. In view of this numerous and diverse terminology for denoting “synagogues” in the ancient world, we should at least allow for the possibility that ἐπισυναγωγή may also have been used in this way. Given that its use in *Heb* 10:25 is not fully comparable with other extant uses of this term, but bears a striking resonance with the ancient ideas about synagogues, perhaps “synagogue” was within its semantic range for a short while, and *Heb* 10:25 is our sole surviving example? If so, then, given that synagogue attendance was closely connected with the observance of the Sabbath, we might also suppose the author’s practice and encouragement of Sabbath observance.

Conclusion

Without wishing to deny the possibility that there may be a limited textual basis for anti-Jewish interpretations of Hebrews, we have found that even the most qualified and nuanced of these still falls short of assimilating all the evidence to the contrary, and of negotiating the various complicating factors adequately. Many modern interpreters continue to operate within the same interpretative paradigms as Chrysostom. A definite (and anachronistic) line is drawn between “Judaism” and “Christianity,” Hebrews is fixed firmly in the latter, and perceived to be arguing strongly against the former, and, more often than not, this argument is construed in terms of a wholesale rejection of Judaism, despite the specificity of the criticisms, and eschatology of the innovations. The elusiveness of the social context of Hebrews does not permit the detailed reconstructions that usually accompany such anti-Jewish interpretations. The sectarian *beliefs*, mystical *experiences*, and eschatological *expectations* that may be inferred from the text of Hebrews do not tell us very much about the circumstances behind the text. As far as we know, the day to day lives of the people behind Hebrews may have looked very similar to that of most ordinary Jews of the day, something that may be confirmed by the author’s possible passing references to ritual purification and synagogue attendance. In short, classifications of Hebrews as “anti-Jewish” are not as straightforward as many have supposed, and, at the very least, we may confidently affirm that Chrysostom was way off the mark.

ABBREVIATIONS

BBR: Bulletin for Biblical Research
 CBR: Currents in Biblical Research
 CRINT: Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
 HTR: Harvard Theological Review
 Int: Interpretation
 JBL: Journal of Biblical Literature
 JSNT: Journal for the Study of the New Testament
 JSNTSup: Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
 JSOT: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
 JTS: Journal of Theological Studies
 KEK: Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
 NICNT: New International Commentary on the New Testament
 NIGTC: New International Greek Testament Commentary
 NovTSup: Novum Testamentum Supplements
 NTS: New Testament Studies
 WUNT II: Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II

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HYPOCRITES OR PIOUS SCHOLARS? THE IMAGE OF THE PHARISEES IN SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD TEXTS AND RABBINIC LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses upon Josephus' portrayal of the Pharisees during the reign of Queen Alexandra, relating it to their depiction in other contemporary sources (the New Testament, Qumran documents) as well as rabbinic literature. The numerous hostile descriptions of the Pharisees in both *War* and *Antiquities* are examined based upon a philological, textual and source-critical analysis. Explanations are then offered for the puzzling negative description of the Pharisees in rabbinic literature (*bSotah* 22b), who are considered the predecessors of the sages. The hypocrisy charge against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 is analyzed from a religious-political perspective and allegorical references to the Pharisees as "Seekers of Smooth Things" in Peshet Nahum are also connected to the hypocrisy motif. This investigation leads to the conclusion that an anti-Pharisee bias is not unique to the New Testament but is also found in Jewish sources from the Second Temple period. It most probably reflects the rivalry among the various competing religious/political groups and their struggle for dominance.

Who were the Pharisees – a small religious sect, an influential political party, or a mass movement? Attempts to define and describe the phenomenon of the Pharisees have aroused considerable scholarly debate for decades.¹ This article will focus upon Josephus' portrayal of the Pharisees during the reign of Queen Alexandra in *The Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities* and attempt to understand how it can shed light upon their depiction in other Second Temple period texts – the New Testament (Matthew) and Qumran documents (*Peshet Nahum*), as well as in rabbinic literature (*bSotah*).

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¹ A comprehensive examination of the Pharisees is beyond the scope of this article. Following is a sampling of studies on Josephus and the Pharisees: Albert Baumgarten, "The Name of the Pharisees," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 411-428; Shaye Cohen, "Parallel Traditions in Josephus and Rabbinic Literature," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 7-14; David Goodblatt, "The Place of the Pharisees in First Century Judaism: The State of the Debate," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 20:1 (1989): 12-30; Martin Goodman, "A Note on Josephus, the Pharisees and Ancestral Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 (1999): 17-20; Martin Hengel and Roland Deines, "E.P. Sanders' 'Common Judaism,' Jesus, and the Pharisees," *Journal of Theological Studies* 46, no. 1 (April 1995); Gustav Hölscher, s.v. "Josephus," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* 9 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler 1916), cols. 1934-2000; Gustav Hölscher, *Die Quellen des Josephus* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904); Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety* (Providence: Prentice Hall, 1973); Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, eds., *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (Waco, Texas: Baylor U. Press, 2007); Anthony Saldarini, "Pharisees," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 289-303; Morton Smith, "Palestinian Judaism in the First Century" in *Israel, Its Role in Civilization*, ed. Davis, Moshe (New York: Israel Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1956), 67-81. For an in-depth treatment of the Pharisees and Josephus, see Steve Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees: A Composition-Critical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1991, 2001).

Josephus first mentions the Pharisees in *War* in connection with the ascent to the throne of Queen Alexandra,² the first (and only) Jewish woman who reigned as an independent queen in Judaea:

But growing besides her as she achieved authority the Pharisees arose – a certain band [σύνταγμα τι] of Judaeans who have the reputation of being more pious than the others, and they accurately proclaim the (ancient ancestral) laws.³ (*War* 1:110)

The vocabulary in this passage reveals a subtly disapproving attitude towards Pharisees. This is shown, for example, by the use of *síntagma* (σύνταγμα) band, which Steve Mason notes is usually used in a pejorative sense by Josephus.⁴ Likewise the verb *dokhéō* (δοκέω) suggests an unfavorable approach towards the Pharisees. According to Mason, the definition of the Pharisees in *War* 1:110 hinges on this verb.⁵ He interprets *dokhéō* as “having the reputation of being” for “it was the Pharisees reputation for piety that won them the support of Alexandra Salome.”⁶ Yet Mason posits that *dokhéō* means that the Pharisees only appeared to be pious while, on the other hand, Alexandra was genuinely pious. The Pharisees subsequent actions – “killing whomever they wished on false charges” – demonstrated that they were, actually, “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”⁷ As we shall see, Josephus’ extremely critical attitude towards the Pharisees continues throughout the narrative on Queen Alexandra in *War*.

Interestingly, many scholars have used *War* 1:110 to bolster their hypothesis of the Pharisees being a mass movement with popular support, ignoring (or unaware of) its negative overtones. For example, Martin Goodman asserts that the Pharisees’ “endorsement of ancestral tradition gave them great popularity.”⁸ Martin Hengel and Roland Deines claim this passage demonstrates that the Pharisees had great authority: “... the Pharisees’ claim to be the carriers and continuers of this tradition worked in combination with their ἀκρίβεια [accuracy] in scriptural interpretation and their strict manner of life to strengthen their authority in the eyes of the people.”⁹

On the other hand, Jacob Neusner views the Pharisees as only one of many political parties during the Hasmonean era (a party of “philosophical politicians”), whose political life ended with Herod’s rule.¹⁰ In contrast, Daniel Schwartz believes that Josephus’ description of the Pharisees is actually a protective device inasmuch as “BJ reflects

² The Pharisees are mentioned only briefly in Josephus’ works – six other times in *War* (1:112, 1:571, 2:119, 2:162, 2:166, 2:411) as well as thirty-five times in *Antiquities* and *Life*. Steve Mason notes that “[a]ny interpretation of Josephus’s Pharisees must reckon with a basic fact, all too often overlooked. Namely, the group figures only incidentally in his thirty volumes.” See Steve Mason, “Josephus’s Pharisees” in Neusner and Chilton, *Historical Pharisees*, 4.

³ This and all subsequent translations of *War* and *Antiquities* are my own, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Steve Mason, “War 1:107-114: The Pharisees and Alexandra Salome, I,” in *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees*, 84-85. A more neutral word for σύνταγμα is used by both H. St. J. Thackeray – “body” and Ullmann – “group” (קבוצת) (ההורים). See H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus, The Jewish War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1927), 53 and Lisa Ullmann, *Yosef Ben Matityahu [Titus] Flavius Josephus, History of the Jewish War Against the Romans* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Carmel 2009), 107.

⁵ Mason, “Pharisees and Alexandra,” 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸ Martin Goodman, “A Note on Josephus,” 20.

⁹ Hengel and Deines, “Common Judaism,” 38.

¹⁰ Neusner, *Politics to Piety*, 45-66.

Josephus' attempt to portray the Pharisees, incorrectly, but safely, as uninvolved in politics and certainly as uninvolved in rebellion."¹¹

Nevertheless, Josephus' motives for writing this passage do not change the impression that it conveys to the reader – that, based on Mason's translation, the Pharisees are a devious group. If so, this would also indicate that they did not enjoy widespread support.

The Pharisees are again the focus of matters in *War* 1:113:

Thus they themselves [the Pharisees] [κτείνουσιν αὐτοῖ] slew a certain Diogenes, a notable person, a friend of Alexander, having charged him with being an advisor concerning the 800 (men) who had been crucified by the king. They urged Alexandra to destroy the others too who had incited Alexander against them; and she yielded, being superstitious, and they killed whomever they wished.

By using the words “they themselves slew” [κτείνουσιν αὐτοῖ], Josephus emphasizes that the Pharisees are the ones responsible for killing Diogenes, and not Alexandra. Once again, Josephus severely criticizes the Pharisees, accusing them of being cruel and bloodthirsty.

Let us now examine the description of the Pharisees in Josephus' later work.¹² *Antiquities* adds a whole new block of information – the account of Alexander Jannaeus' deathbed bequest of the kingdom to his wife, Alexandra, and his advice for keeping it secure, which has no parallel in *War*.

Then, she should go as from a brilliant victory to Jerusalem, support the Pharisees, [and] grant them some power, for they, by giving her approval in exchange for these honors, would render the people well disposed to her, and he said, these [Pharisees] have much power among the Judaeans – both hurting those that they hate while helping those with whom they are friendly. For they are highly trusted by the people, even when they speak harshly of someone due to envy, and he himself had come into conflict with the people due to these [Pharisees] ... (*Ant.* 13: 401-402)

Jonathan Goldstein believes that the death-bed scene appears only in Josephus' later work since “in later life Josephus became more and more sympathetic to the Pharisees” and that it “looks very much like Pharisaic propaganda.”¹³ Yet this theory does not accord with the tone of the narrative. For example, the phrase “these [Pharisees] have much power among the Judaeans – both hurting those that they hate while helping those with whom they are friendly” is not very complimentary to the Pharisees.¹⁴

¹¹ Daniel Schwartz, “Josephus and Nicolaus on the Pharisees,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 14 (1983), 169.

¹² According to Christopher P. Jones, 79 AD is the *terminus ante* for most of *War* and 81 AD for its completion (Christopher Jones, “Towards a Chronology of Josephus,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 [2002], 114). The dating of *Antiquities* is clearer as *Ant.* 20:267 relates that it was completed in the “13th year of the reign of Domitian Caesar,” that is, 93/94 CE. Ibid; see also Daniel Schwartz, trans., *Flavius Josephus, Vita: Introduction, Hebrew Translation, and Commentary* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2007), 4.

¹³ Jonathan Goldstein, “The Hasmonean Revolt and the Hasmonean Dynasty,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, eds. W. Davies and L. Finkelstein, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), 343.

¹⁴ Indeed, Daniel Schwartz notes that this passage expresses the Pharisees' influence in a “nasty way,” see Schwartz, “Josephus and Nicolaus,” 159, and the entire article.

Some scholars have claimed that source-critical theories can account for Josephus' hostile attitude towards the Pharisees in *Antiquities*. Viewing the term φθόνος [envy]¹⁵ in Jannaeus' deathbed oration as part of a recurring motif of "success followed by envy" in Josephus' writings, Israel Shatzman contends Josephus took the original version of the story in *War* and then inserted the accusation that the Pharisees were moved by envy in *Antiquities*.¹⁶ Shatzman concludes that inasmuch as Josephus was proud of his Hasmonean ancestry, this negative description of a Hasmonean monarch could only be due to Josephus' source, Nicolaus of Damascus, who often used the motif of "success followed by envy."¹⁷ Likewise, Daniel Schwartz also attributes the passages in *Antiquities* hostile to the Pharisees to his source, Nicolaus.¹⁸ He posits that Josephus' earlier work, *War*, reflects an attempt to show that the Pharisees were uninvolved in politics and hence uninvolved in the Jewish rebellion against Rome. Josephus was less cautious about mentioning Pharisaic political involvement in *Antiquities*, according to Schwartz, since the Jewish rebellion against Rome was almost twenty years past.¹⁹ Other scholars also suggest that Josephus relied more upon Nicolaus in *Antiquities* than in *War*.²⁰

Nevertheless, not all of Josephus' descriptions of the Pharisees in *Antiquities* are negative. Let us now turn to several complimentary passages concerning the Pharisees. In describing Alexandra taking the reins of government, Josephus states:

So after Alexandra had taken the citadel, she talked with the Pharisees as her husband had counseled, and offered them all matters connected to his corpse and the kingdom, and their wrath against Alexander ceased, and she made them well-disposed and friendly. (*Ant.* 13:405)

The phrase "she made them [the Pharisees] well-disposed and friendly" demonstrates a major difference in the interaction between Alexandra and the Pharisees in *War* and *Antiquities*. *War* only mentions her delegation of authority to the Pharisees (1:111) but *Antiquities* adds the dimension of friendly and cordial relations. Likewise, *Ant.* 13:408 emphasizes Alexandra's support of the Pharisees' authority:²¹

Thus, even any minor regulation which had been introduced by the Pharisees and revoked by her father-in-law Hyrcanus, even that she once again restored.

¹⁵ Henry George Liddell, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), s.v. "φθόνος," 861, defines this as "ill-will, envy, jealousy."

¹⁶ Israel Shatzman, "Success Followed by Envy: The Greek Tradition and Josephus" [Hebrew], in *Essays in Memory of Menachem Stern and Studies Following his Works* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences, 2002), 36-54. Shatzman notes that envy connected to success, related to historical reports or events, appears dozens of times in Josephus' writings, e.g. *Life* 80, 122; *Ant.* 2:10, 2:13, 6:58-58, 2:199-202, 10:250, 13:288; *War* 1:208, 1:68, 1:72 (46-50).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-53.

¹⁸ Schwartz, "Josephus and Nicolaus," 162.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

²⁰ See Menachem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976), 229; Cohen, "Josephus and His Sources," 48-66; Tal Ilan, "Josephus and Nicolaus on Women," in *Geschichte-Tradition-Reflexion*, eds. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 223-224, 240-241. On the other hand, Laqueur believes that the differences between *War* and *Antiquities* are due to Josephus' changing viewpoint, see Richard Laqueur, *Der Jüdische Historiker Flavius Josephus: Ein Biographischer Versuch auf neuer quellenkritischer Grundlage* (Giessen: Münchow'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1920), 133-134, 261-263.

²¹ This passage is related to *Ant.* 13:296-297, which describes how the Sadducees convinced John Hyrcanus to cancel Pharisaic laws.

Why did the Pharisees have such good relations with Queen Alexandra? Pharisaic support of Queen Alexandra could be due to the fact that her reign separated religion and state. As a woman, Queen Alexandra could not serve as a high priest hence she delegated the priesthood to her eldest son Hyrcanus II while retaining secular powers, especially in foreign affairs.²² Thus cordial relations between the Pharisees and Alexandra were in the interests of both parties – Alexandra required the Pharisees' support in order to acquire legitimacy for her reign and the Pharisees supported Alexandra in order to gain control of religious affairs.²³ This friendly relationship adds a very favorable element to the portrayal of the Pharisees.

These sympathetic passages in *Antiquities* have prompted many scholars to assume that Josephus supported the Pharisees and that they represented a popular movement.²⁴ Moreover, it is presumed that Josephus even became a Pharisee himself, based upon the following accepted translation of one passage in *Life* 12²⁵:

Being now in my nineteenth year *I began to govern my life by the rules of the Pharisees* [ἤρξαμην τε πολιτεύσθαι τῇ Φαρισαίων αἵρέσει κατακολουθῶν], a sect having points of resemblance to that which the Greeks call the Stoic school.²⁶

In a ground-breaking study Steve Mason disputes the commonly held view that Josephus “wanted to present himself as a devoted Pharisee.”²⁷ Instead, Mason contends that Josephus, like the Sadducee opponents of the Pharisees, was compelled to follow Pharisee dictates due to their overwhelming influence.²⁸ Consequently, this passage does not mean that Josephus himself became a Pharisee rather that:

²² Daniel Schwartz points out that the Pharisaic opposition to Hasmoneans in general, and to Alexander Jannaeus in particular, was due to the fact that they “held it was not legitimate to join priesthood and monarchy.” See Daniel Schwartz, “On Pharisaic Opposition to the Hasmonean Monarchy,” in *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 53. On the other hand, David Goodblatt posits that “possession of the high priesthood continued to be an important source of legitimation for the Hasmonean dynasty until its end.” Since Queen Alexandra did not hold the office of high priest, and this contradicted the model of what Goodblatt terms the “priestly monarchy,” she therefore required the Pharisees' support in order to give an aura of religious legitimacy to her reign. See David Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government* (Tübingen: Mohr 1994), 26.

²³ For a discussion of the initial rift between the Pharisees and the Hasmoneans, see Avraham Schalit, “Internal Policy and Political Institutions” [Hebrew], in *The Hellenistic Age* [Hebrew], ed. Avraham Schalit (Jerusalem 1983), 182-186.

²⁴ For instance, Morton Smith claims that Josephus emphasizes the Pharisees' popularity in order to convince the Roman government to support the Pharisaic endeavor in Yavneh: “That [Roman] government must have been faced with the problem: Which group of Jews shall we support? ... Which Jews ... can command enough popular following to keep things stable in Palestine? To this question Josephus is volunteering an answer: The Pharisees ...” See Smith, “Palestinian Judaism,” 75-76. See also Lee Levine “The Political Struggle between Pharisees and Sadducees in the Hasmonean Period” [Hebrew], in *Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period: Abraham Schalit Memorial Volume* [Hebrew], eds. A. Oppenheimer, U. Rappaport and M. Stern (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1971), 69.

²⁵ For example, Shaye Cohen states that *Life* “declares that Josephus had always been, since his youth, a loyal follower of the Pharisees.” See Shaye Cohen, “Josephus and His Sources,” in *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 238. See also Jacob Neusner, “Josephus' Pharisees,” *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren Oblata*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 231.

²⁶ Flavius Josephus, *The Life and Against Apion*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926, 1956), 7.

²⁷ See Steve Mason, “Was Josephus a Pharisee? A Re-Examination of Life 10-12,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40, no. 1 (1989): 31, and the entire article; see also Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees*, 342-356.

²⁸ Mason, “Was Josephus a Pharisee,” 42-43.

Josephus's 'following of the Pharisaic school' was merely a necessary function of his entry into public life. It was not a deliberate choice of religious affiliation or a conversion ... *Life* 12 ... cannot justify the attribution of anti-Pharisaic passages in Josephus to some other source."²⁹

Mason therefore offers a new (and in his opinion the correct) translation of the first six words of this passage:

Being now in my nineteenth year, I began to involve myself in *polis* affairs [or 'become politically involved'] ... following after [or 'following the authority of'] the school of the Pharisees.³⁰

Mason also contends that *Antiquities* regards "Alexandra's policy of cultivating the Pharisees as an unqualified disaster."³¹ He cites three passages in *Antiquities* in order to demonstrate that Josephus viewed the Pharisees as a calamity for both Queen Alexandra and the land of Judaea: 1) the Pharisees were "unprincipled power mongers" (13:406); 2) they slaughtered their enemies (13:412); and 3) the Hasmoneans lost the dynasty because of Alexandra's concessions to the Pharisees (13:430-432).³² Other passages in *Antiquities* also support Mason's claim of an anti-Pharisaic bias, e.g. "they [the Pharisees] were no different than despots" (13:409); "And the entire country was quiet except for the Pharisees, for they troubled the queen by entreating her to kill those who had advised Alexander to kill the eight hundred" (13:410); "Afterwards, they cut the throat of one of them, Diogenes, and following him, one after another" (13:411). Reports of such cruel acts by the Pharisees certainly would not encourage anyone to support them.³³

The numerous hostile descriptions of the Pharisees in connection with Queen Alexandra's reign in both *War* and *Antiquities* could indicate that Josephus was not the only one to hold such a negative attitude towards this group. In fact, this might have been the outlook of a certain segment of Jewish society in the late Second Temple Period.

Rabbinic texts echo various episodes in Josephus accounts, including the phenomenon of the Pharisees during the reign of Queen Alexandra.³⁴ Let us examine one such text:

אמר לה ינאי מלכה לדביתיה: אל תתיראי מן הפרושים, ולא ממי שאינן פרושים, אלא מן הצבועין שדומין לפרושים, שמעשהן כמעשה זמרי, ומבקשין שכר כפנחס.

King Yannai said to his wife: "fear not the Pharisees nor those who are not Pharisees but the hypocrites who appear as if they are Pharisees because their deeds are like the deeds of Zimri but they request a reward like Phineas."³⁵ (*bSotah* 22b)

²⁹ Mason, *Flavius Josephus*, 356.

³⁰ See Mason, "Josephus's Pharisees," 32.

³¹ Mason, "Pharisaic Dominance," 369.

³² Ibid.

³³ In opposition to Mason, Shaye Cohen believes that "Alexander Jannaeus still has a few nasty things to say about the Pharisees, but, on the whole, these sectarians do better in AJ than in BJ." See Shaye Cohen, "Josephus and His Sources," 237.

³⁴ Rabbinic sources that mention Queen Alexandra include *Sifra Lev BeHukotai* 1:1, *Sifrei Deut* 42, *bTa'anit* 23a, *bSotah* 22a, *bBerakhot* 48a, *Tosfot Shabbat* 16b (from *d'amar*); *Vayikra Rabba* 35, *Megillat Ta'anit* 28th of Tevet. For an examination of parallel accounts in Josephus and rabbinic literature, see Shaye Cohen, "Parallel Traditions."

³⁵ Zimri was killed by Phineas the Priest for taking a Midianite wife and worshipping their gods (Num 25:1-16). Isidore Epstein, *The Talmud: Sotah* (London: Soncino, 1978), 22b, n. 7, believes that this refers to Josephus' account (*Ant.* 13: 17, 5) of a group of zealots requesting the assistance of Demetrius Eucarus, King of Syria, in their struggle against Alexander Jannaeus.

This passage somewhat parallels King Alexander Jannaeus' (Yannai) advice to Queen Alexandra on his deathbed (*Ant.* 13:401), discussed above, which describes the Pharisees in hostile terms. Why does Yannai's warning appear here? The gemara is connected to the baraita in *mSotah* 3:4 (cited in *bSotah* 20a), interpreting the phrase "the plagues of Pharisees" [מכות פרושים]:

רבי יהושע אומר: רוצה אישה בקב ותפלות, מתשעה קבין ופרישות; והוא היה אומר, חסיד שוטה, רשע ערום, אישה פרושה, מכות פרושים--הרי אלו מבלי עולם.

Rabbi Yehoshua says: A woman prefers one kab³⁶ and sexual indulgence to nine kab³⁷ and abstinence. He used to say: "a foolish pietist, a cunning evildoer, a female Pharisee, and the plagues of Pharisees – all of these bring destruction upon the world."³⁸

There are two possible connections between *bSotah* 22b and the above mishnah. According to Albeck's commentary on the Mishnah, "a female Pharisee" [אישה פרושה] has a positive context and refers to a woman who is zealous in her asceticism and modesty. This expression may therefore refer to Queen Alexandra, since she supported the Pharisees. On the other hand, Albeck notes that the phrase "the plagues of Pharisees" [מכות פרושים] denotes the evil Pharisees who are hypocritical and only outwardly act with asceticism: [המקולקלים שבפרושים, הצבועים שנוהגים בפרישות למראית עין].³⁹ The gemara may consequently be linking the Pharisees with Queen Alexandra, or with hypocritical actions, or both. Tal Ilan maintains that the word *perishut* [פרישות] in *mSotah* 3:4 should not be translated as abstinence but rather "the teachings of Pharisaism," which attracted women and which Rabbi Yehoshua viewed as dangerous.⁴⁰ This also would connect Queen Alexandra, as a woman, with the Pharisees.

The description of the Pharisees in *mSotah* 3:4 has puzzled scholars since, on the one hand, it gives a very negative interpretation of anything connected to the word "Pharisee" [פרוש] while, on the other hand, they are considered the predecessors of the sages, and as such, are usually only regarded positively in rabbinic literature. Menahem Mansoor claims that this passage demonstrates that "the leaders were well aware of the presence of the insincere among their numbers."⁴¹ In other words, the Pharisees wanted to show that a small minority within their group were insincere.

Another explanation for the inclusion of this attack upon the Pharisees is connected to the origin of the name Pharisee. Solomon Zeitlin asserts that the Sadducees coined Pharisee as a term of contempt for those who advocated new laws and reforms.⁴² Ellis Rivkin supports Zeitlin's characterization and notes that the name "Pharisee" [פרוש] was given to this group by their opponents (the Sadducees), who "regarded these scholars as 'usurpers,' 'separatists,' 'heretics' ...".⁴³ Tannaitic literature only uses the term Pharisee in

³⁶ A small amount, that is, a scanty livelihood.

³⁷ A large amount, that is, a luxurious living.

³⁸ For an in-depth examination of *mSotah* 3:4, see Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and other Jewish Women* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 74-97.

³⁹ See Hanoch Albeck, *The Six Orders of the Mishna* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik/Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1988), 241.

⁴⁰ Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 95-96. Although Ellis Rivkin emphatically states that *perishut* "means 'abstinence', 'continence', and not 'Pharisaism!'" See Ellis Rivkin, "Defining the Pharisees: The Tannaitic Sources," *HUCA* 40-41 (1970): 243.

⁴¹ See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Pharisees," 31.

⁴² Solomon Zeitlin, *Studies in the Early History of Judaism*, vol. 2 (New York: Ktav, 1974), 294-295.

⁴³ Ellis Rivkin, "Scribes, Pharisees, Lawyers, Hypocrites: A Study in Synonymity," *HUCA* 49 (1978), 140. Rivkin emphasizes that the Pharisees never called themselves Pharisees by citing *mYadayim* 4:6: "The Sadducees say, 'We

disputes with the Sadducees and otherwise it avoids using this name (instead they are termed sages or scribes, a scholar class).⁴⁴ Thus, inasmuch as the rabbis usually did not identify themselves with the name “Pharisee” but rather viewed themselves as sages, tannaitic sources, such as *mSotah* 3:4, had no problem with an unfavorable description of a group called Pharisees.

Interestingly, the term Pharisees acquires a positive connotation in the gemara: there is no need to fear either those who are Pharisees [פרושי] or their opponents (probably the Sadducees), however those who we have to fear are the hypocrites [צבועין]. These hypocrites appear to act like Pharisees (which in this context means laudable acts) but actually behave like Zimri and rebel against God (commit evil acts). Thus the Pharisees themselves are not evil but rather those who masquerade as them and act sinfully. This analogy may indicate that the Babylonian rabbis were confronted with such a phenomenon in their time (and which has appeared throughout time!) – people who outwardly appeared religious but were not truly so in reality.

Richard Kalmin notes that prior to the pericope about Yannai and his wife, the gemara presents a statement by Rav Nahman bar Yizhak criticizing those who cloak themselves:⁴⁵

אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק דמטמרא מטמרא ודמגליא מגליא בי דינא רבה ליתפרע מהני דחפו גונדי

That which is hidden is hidden. That which is revealed is revealed. The great [that is, heavenly] court will punish those who wrap themselves in cloaks. (*bSotah* 22b)

Kalmin believes that this also refers to the Pharisees due to the context, and that it therefore connects the Pharisees with hypocrisy (although this is mitigated by the subsequent story of Yannai).

Let us return to the rabbinic account of Yannai’s advice to his wife. Scholarship is divided as to whether rabbinic texts that parallel Josephan accounts, such as *bSotah* 22b, are based upon Josephus’ writings, or upon other earlier sources or if the Josephan narrative is “earlier than the rabbinic” and “[Josephan parallels ... illuminate the ways in which the rabbis molded the traditions they received.”⁴⁶ Some scholars believe that the traditions of the BT either read some version of Josephus or incorporated Josephus-like traditions into the BT.⁴⁷ Due to the fact that the literary form of rabbinic texts date, at the earliest, to the third century, Shaye Cohen contends that “[Josephan traditions are older and more ‘original’ than the rabbinic” and that in some cases, the rabbinic accounts are derived from Josephus.⁴⁸ In contrast, Shamma Friedman hypothesizes that “the fact that there are parallels in the Tosefta, Mishnah and Genesis Rabbah to most of the events

complain against you Pharisees because you say that Holy Scriptures renders the hands unclean” (ibid., 141). Here we see that it is the Sadducees who are calling the Pharisees as such.

⁴⁴ Rivkin, “Defining the Pharisees,” 246-248.

⁴⁵ See Richard Lee Kalmin *Mitigating Tales: The Talmud’s Narratives and their Historical Context* (Oakland, CA: University of California, 2014), 165-166.

⁴⁶ See Cohen, “Parallel Traditions,” 14. Recently, Vered Noam has proposed that a rabbinic text that parallels Josephus, *bKid* 66a, is actually a Pharisaic polemical work, see Vered Noam, “The Story of King Jannaeus (*b. Qidduṣh* 66a): A Pharisaic Reply to Sectarian Polemic,” *Harvard Theological Review* 107:1 (January 2014): 31-58. Noam also notes that she is now engaged on a research project on such parallel traditions.

⁴⁷ Shaye Cohen, “Parallel Traditions,” 13. Based upon a striking parallel between another rabbinic and Josephan text (*bKid* 66a and *Ant.* 13:288), Richard Kalmin asserts that “It is not out of the question that Josephus himself was the rabbis’ source.” See Richard Lee Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56, see also 149-172.

⁴⁸ See Shaye Cohen, “Parallel Traditions,” 8, and the entire article.

described in Josephus' writings increases the probability that the descriptions that are solely in the Bavli did not reach it directly via Josephus' writings but rather through lost sources of Palestinian Talmudic literature."⁴⁹

As regards our text in particular, Tal Ilan asserts that *bSotah* 22b encompasses an oral tradition that preserves a better and earlier version of Alexander Jannaeus' deathbed statement than Josephus' description in *Antiquities*.⁵⁰ Richard Kalmin maintains that, in the case of *bSotah* 22b and *Ant.* 13:398-404, "the story about Yannai and his wife reached Babylonia from the Roman East, and was reworked and placed in its present context ... some time between the fourth century and the final redaction of the Bavli."⁵¹ Whatever its source, *bSotah* 22b clearly encompasses a tradition similar to the account in *Antiquities*. Moreover, in the discussion of the baraita, the Bavli "acknowledges that there are several kinds of Perushim with negative attributes."⁵² Furthermore, the very statement that the Perushim are *not* to be feared means that others *do* fear them, thereby revealing a rather unenthusiastic rabbinic attitude towards the Pharisees.⁵³ If, as many scholars believe, *bSotah* 22b is based upon an earlier tradition (no matter what its source), then this story could also reflect the outlook of certain circles in the Second Temple period.

Not only does rabbinic literature provide a literary parallel with Josephus' writings, but its portrayal of the Pharisees as hypocrites also bears a striking similarity to the NT. Various passages in Matthew 23 either describe a hypocritical act by the Pharisees or designate the group itself as hypocrites. For example:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach but do not practice (Mt. 23:2-3)⁵⁴

The term hypocrites and the idea of hypocrisy are repeated throughout the rest of chapter 23 in the seven woe oracles (Mt. 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29), which contain the formula:

Οὐαὶ δὲ ὑμῖν, γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι ὑποκριταί
["Woe, woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."].⁵⁵

What is the intention of Mt. 23:2-3? Is it indeed an attack upon the Pharisees? An examination of the wording reveals that this polemic acknowledges the authority of the Pharisees although it attacks their practices. For, as Goodman succinctly notes, "Jesus' objection here is quite explicitly not to the teachings of the Pharisees but to their alleged

⁴⁹ Friedman's assertion is based upon an analysis of *bKid* 66a and *Ant.* 13:288 and other sources. I thank Shamma Friedman for providing me with a copy of his unpublished lecture in Hebrew delivered at Tel Aviv University in 1990.

⁵⁰ Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1999), 21-23.

⁵¹ Kalmin *Mitigating Tales*, 169.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Although, as Kalmin notes, rabbinic literature is not monolithic and includes both positive and negative portrayals of the Pharisees (*ibid.*, 174).

⁵⁴ NT quotations in English are from the RSV.

⁵⁵ This formula is also used in Matt 23:15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 5:20, 12:38. NT quotations from Greek are from the Perseus website (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>) based on *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, text revised by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort (New York: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square. 1885). On the seven woe oracles, see Anthony Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 46-52.

hypocritical failure to conform to their own advice.”⁵⁶ Jacob Neusner believes that “the competition between the Pharisees and the Christian missionaries for the loyalty of the mass of Jews lies at the foundation of these sayings.”⁵⁷ According to Anthony Saldarini, this polemic indicates that the Pharisees represented the dominant leadership movement while the believers in Jesus constituted a minority reform movement.⁵⁸ Therefore:

the author of Matthew seeks specifically to delegitimize rival Jewish leaders and legitimate himself and his group as the true leaders of Israel, accurate interpreters of the Bible and authentic messengers of God’s will ... Thus Matthew writes as a member of the late first century Jewish community ... who is seeking influence and power in order to establish Jesus’ way of life.⁵⁹

David Garland also agrees that “this structural unit [the woe oracles] is entirely attributable to Matthew’s editorial hand.”⁶⁰ Garland further asserts that “... it is possible that the charge goes back before Matthew to a Palestinian community or even to Jesus where a Hebraic coloring might be determinative.”⁶¹ This supports the hypothesis that Matthew is describing a tendency that existed during Josephus’ time⁶² – the Pharisees were not all as pious as they claimed to be. Indeed, this is exactly what Josephus states in *Antiquities* when he describes the Pharisees as pretenders who opposed the king:

There was also a segment of Jews that prided itself greatly on its extreme precise observance of the ancestral heritage and pretended [προσποιούντων] to observe laws with which the deity was pleased. By them the female faction [or clique] was directed. Called Pharisees, these men were eminently capable of predictions for the king’s benefit and yet, evidently, they rose up to combat and injure him.⁶³ (*Ant.* 17:41)

Here Josephus uses the Greek προσποιέω, which means “to take what does not belong to one, pretend to, lay claim to.”⁶⁴ This word is quite similar in meaning to *úpokrités* – metaphor for “a pretender, dissembler, hypocrite.”⁶⁵

Thus we see that Josephus, the NT and rabbinic literature all associate the motif of hypocrisy, the contradiction between outward behavior and pronouncements, with the Pharisees. At the very least, this indicates a common tradition.

The origin of this hypocrisy motif has aroused much discussion. Based upon *bSotah* 22b, Anthony Saldarini suggests that the pejorative references to the Pharisees in the gemara are responding to Christian polemics in the fifth and sixth centuries: “the Talmudic authors defuse Christian criticism by agreeing with their attack on hypocritical Pharisees

⁵⁶ Goodman, “A Note on Josephus,” 19.

⁵⁷ Neusner, *Politics to Piety*, 77.

⁵⁸ Anthony Saldarini, “Delegitimization of Leaders in Matthew 23,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 54 (1992), 665.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 661.

⁶⁰ David Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 91.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶² Martin Pickup points out that Matthew is “dated in the 80s or 90s at a time when the Pharisees appear to have risen in prominence and power.” See Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, eds., *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (Waco, Texas: Baylor U. Press, 2007), 67.

⁶³ Translated by Steve Mason in “Pharisaic Dominance before 70 CE and the Gospels’ Hypocrisy Charge (Matt 23:2-3),” *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1990), 369.

⁶⁴ Liddell, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “προσποιέω,” def. 2, 696.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, s.v. “úpokριτή,” def. 2, 844.

and by separating some Pharisees and themselves from those being attacked.”⁶⁶ Richard Kalmin contends that “the New Testament and the Bavli independently received the ‘hypocrisy’ and ‘holier than thou’ motifs from an earlier source ... either directly from the Roman East or indirectly via Syriac translations from Mesopotamia.”⁶⁷ Steve Mason maintains that “the mere fact of Pharisaic dominance before 70 CE may be the key to understanding Jesus’ hypocrisy charge.” Noting that “it is an observable phenomenon that leaders and policy-makers invariably attract the charge of hypocrisy from disaffected groups,”⁶⁸ Mason concludes that:

Jesus ... joined others in denouncing the apparent hypocrisy of the policy-makers, without thereby questioning the legitimacy of their role as scriptural exegetes. But this authentic hypocrisy charge was naturally misconstrued by groups within the church ... and was reborn as an outright rejection of Pharisaic teaching.⁶⁹

If Mason is correct, then the passage in *Sotah* may preserve the original meaning of the pericope in the New Testament as well as the Josephan passages – the Pharisaic teachings are not hypocritical per se and therefore should not be rejected, but rather the conduct of individual Pharisees is hypocritical.

Qumran texts also refer to the Pharisees, albeit allegorically.⁷⁰ For example, *Pesher Nahum* 3:1 condemns the Pharisees in very harsh tones. It describes the “Seekers of Smooth Things” [דורשי החלקות], assumed to be a codename for the Pharisees, as conducting themselves in lies and falsehoods – בכחש ושקר[ים] יתהלכו.⁷¹ Garland points out that the term “Seekers of Smooth Things” “seems to possess somewhat the same ambiguity in meaning as ... the Greek word ‘hypocrite.’”⁷² In fact, he believes that there is a connection between the hypocrites in Mt. 23 and the “Seekers of Smooth Things” in Qumran literature since “[b]oth terms may connote dissimulation or deceit and false interpretation ... In both cases, the opposition to the Pharisees was not precipitated by moral outrage over their false character but by serious disputes involving the interpretation of Scripture.”⁷³ In opposition to Mason’s theory that the NT hypocrites only refer to the Pharisees’ political role, Garland believes that in the NT ‘hypocrite’ “may be rooted in Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees’ false interpretation of the law, and it summarized their failure as God’s appointed leaders”⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Saldarini, “Pharisees,” 300-301.

⁶⁷ Kalmin, *Mitigating Tales*, 167.

⁶⁸ Mason, “Pharisaic Dominance,” 380.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁷⁰ A discussion of Qumran texts and the Pharisees is beyond the scope of this article. For further discussion, see David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period*, trans. Azzan Yadin, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007), 218-220; Lawrence Schiffman, “Pharisees and Sadducees in *Pesher Nahum*,” in *Minha Le-Nahum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honor of His 70th Birthday*, eds. Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 272-290; Saldarini, “Pharisees,” 301-303; Anthony Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc., 1988), esp. 279-280; James VanderKam, “*Pesher Nahum* and *Josephus*,” in *When Judaism and Christianity Began: Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini*, eds. Alan J. Avery-Peck, Daniel Harrington and Jacob Neusner, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 299-311.

⁷¹ See Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 65, and Hanan Eshel, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2004), 122.

⁷² Garland, *Intention of Matthew*, 107.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

What can we conclude from the above analysis? First of all, we can perceive a common thread that runs through the various Second Temple Period sources – a critical and even hostile view of the Pharisees. *War* and *Antiquities* describe the Pharisees as devious and power-hungry; they do not shirk from any brutal means in order to obtain dominance. Matthew and *Pesher Nahum* label the Pharisees “hypocrites” or “pretenders,” disputing their interpretation of Scripture and their status as religious leaders. This antagonistic attitude is due to the fact that these three sources represented religious/political groups opposed to the Pharisees: Josephus – the priestly elite, Mathew – the followers of Jesus, and *Pesher Nahum* – the Qumran community.

On the other hand, the rabbinic account in the Bavli dispelled the hypocrisy charge by distinguishing between the “real Pharisees” and those who act as if they are Pharisees but in reality are not. By separating the Pharisees (and perhaps themselves?) from pseudo-Pharisees (pretenders), the tradents of the rabbinic texts succeeded in turning around the Josephan and NT negative description of the Pharisees as hypocrites and thereby eliminated criticism of the group.⁷⁵ Consequently, instead of Pharisees who “pretended to observe laws” (*Ant* 17: 41) and “preach but do not practice” (*Mt.* 23:3), they are only “not to be feared” (*bSotah* 22b) for the hypocrites [צבועין] represent the real danger. Nevertheless, the very fact that rabbinic literature felt a need to defend the Pharisees demonstrates that they were indeed subject to attack by other Jewish groups. And, by stating that “fear” was associated with the Pharisees, rabbinic literature demonstrates that they were not universally liked.

Thus, viewed against the background of other Second Temple Period sources and reactions to them, the NT’s condemnation of the Pharisees does not appear to be so out of place. Indeed, it is possible that the NT was influenced by contemporary anti-Pharisee views, which stemmed from a struggle between the Pharisees and other groups for dominance.

Does that mean that this was indeed the true nature of Pharisaism? Not necessarily, for the Pharisees figure only marginally in Josephus’ writings and, as an aristocratic priest, Josephus may be voicing the reservations of his class regarding the Pharisees.⁷⁶ Likewise the NT would not approve of the Pharisees since they challenged Jesus’ teachings.⁷⁷ The Qumran community also viewed the Pharisees as a rival group – as liars, misleading others through speech.⁷⁸ Consequently, we can only conclude that the Pharisees were viewed as serious competition by various other groups and that an anti-Pharisee bias is a common motif in Second Temple Period writings (Josephus, Qumran, NT) and echoed in rabbinic texts.⁷⁹ It is unclear as to whether this bias was the popular view of Jewish society or only of certain segments therein but, at the very least, we can say that it did exist.

⁷⁵ Kalmin notes that “due to the New Testament’s general hostility to Judaism, it is unlikely that the Bavli would have incorporated criticism of a Jewish group they tended to sympathize with ... from the New Testament,” See Kalmin, *Mitigating Tales*, 167.

⁷⁶ See Mason, “Josephus’s Pharisees,” 4-10.

⁷⁷ Martin Pickup “Matthew’s and Mark’s Pharisees,” in Neusner and Chilton, *Historical Pharisees*, 67.

⁷⁸ James VanderKam, “The Pharisees and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Neusner and Chilton, *Historical Pharisees*, 236; VanderKam, “*Pesher Nahum* and Josephus.”

⁷⁹ Another example of anti-Pharisee views reflected in rabbinic texts is the periscope in *bKid* 66a. Vered Noam points out that this text is a reaction to “the commonly held opinion that placed the blame for the breach with the Hasmonean dynasty at the Pharisees’ door.” See Noam, “The Story of King Jannaeus,” 45.

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A TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE HEBREW GOSPELS TRANSLATED FROM CATALAN

Pere Casanellas and Harvey J. Hames*

ABSTRACT: The first extant translation of the four Gospels into Hebrew is to be found in a late fifteenth-century manuscript kept in the Vatican Library (Vat. ebr. 100). The study of this manuscript has to date been rather haphazard and very little has been written about it. Delcor argued in 1981 that it was probably translated from Catalan and suggested that the translator was a Jew, probably writing at the end of the fifteenth-century or the start of the sixteenth-century. In this article we attempt to demonstrate that the manuscript is a copy of the original fourteenth or fifteenth century translation. It was indeed based on a Catalan translation of the Gospels, specifically, the so-called “*Bíblia del segle XIV*,” which is to be published in the *Corpus Biblicum Catalanicum*. There are small but significant hints that the translator was a Jew writing for a Jewish audience, in order to provide them with knowledge of these core Christian texts (possibly to help them to undermine Christian polemicists). However, the possibility also exists that this translation was carried out by a converso for others who, in the aftermath of 1391 and the Tortosa disputation, had converted or were considering conversion, in order to inform them about their new faith.

1. The manuscript of the Vatican Library Vat. ebr. 100

The first complete translation of the four Gospels into Hebrew is to be found in a late fifteenth-century manuscript written in a Byzantine hand, now in the Vatican Library (Vat. ebr. 100). This manuscript is a copy of the original translation though, sadly, there is nothing in the manuscript by means of which we can identify the copyist or the translator. Earlier translations of Matthew into Hebrew and other verses from the Gospels scattered in Jewish anti-Christian polemical works were translated from the Latin, generally from the Vulgate. However, in this case, the translator chose to make the translation based on a vernacular translation of the Gospels into Catalan.

The study of this manuscript has been rather haphazard. In 1936, Josep Maria Millàs i Vallicrosa published a short article in which he looked at Hebrew manuscripts in the Vatican library that were translated from Catalan. At the start of the article, he stated that it is by no means a full list of the possible manuscripts that might have been translated from Catalan into Hebrew. His article was written before Cassuto’s catalogue of 115 of the Hebrew manuscripts in the Vatican Library appeared in 1956,¹ and he used the very old

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¹ *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Codices Vaticanici Hebraici: Codices 1-115*, ed. Umberto Cassuto, *Bybliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codices manu scripti recensiti* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1956).

Catalogue of Stefano Evodio Assemani and Giuseppe Simone Assemani, which appeared in Rome in 1756.² His short study does not mention the manuscript containing the Hebrew translation of the four Gospels and it is impossible to ascertain whether he saw it.³

Cassuto described the manuscript in his Catalogue noting that it could be a translation from Catalan without adding any explanations.⁴ Beyond this, very little has been written about this manuscript aside from commenting on its existence. A two page discussion by D. V. Proverbio in a Vatican publication suggests that the manuscript itself was compiled in Crete but is inconclusive about the possibility of its Catalan origins.⁵ The catalogue of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the National Library in Jerusalem describes the manuscript as being from the fifteenth century in a Byzantine hand and adds Cassuto's comment about the possibility of it being a translation from Catalan. The same information appears in the new catalogue of the *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library* compiled by the staff of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts.⁶ According to this catalogue, the translation is different from the specimens of four other translations collected by A. Marx in "The Polemical Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America."⁷ It refers also to the brief aforementioned text by D.V. Proverbio.

However, in 1981, Maties Delcor carefully examined chapter 10 of Matthew in the Vatican manuscript and based on grammatical formulations and the orthography of the proper names of the Apostles concluded that it was translated from Catalan. He also suggested that corrections in the margin indicate that the manuscript was read and corrected by an Italian, and he was of the opinion that it was a Jew, probably at the end of the fifteenth century or the start of the sixteenth century, who was the translator. Delcor's comments are interesting but inconclusive, and he admitted that both Provençal and Castilian were also possible sources for the Hebrew translation. He also added that even if the translation was from Catalan, it was difficult to know what version of the Gospels was used.⁸

The manuscript itself is a compendium containing three works. The first and largest is the translation of the four gospels, written in a different hand from the last two parts, with which there is no evident connection. It seems likely that this manuscript is a compendium compiled in Crete in the late fifteenth century for a Jewish erudite, perhaps someone like Elia Capsali (ca. 1485-1550), a Rabbi who also composed histories of Venice and

² Stefano Evodio Assemani and Giuseppe Simone Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus in tres partes distributus: in quarum prima orientales in altera Graeci in tertia Latini Italici aliorumque Europaeorum idiomatum codices*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1756; rpt. Paris, 1926), 1, part. 1:1-408.

³ See J. M. Millàs i Vallicrosa, "Manuscrits Hebraïcs d'Origen Català a la Biblioteca Vaticana," in *Homenatge a Antoni Rubió i Lluch: Miscel·lània d'Estudis Literaris Històrics i Lingüístics* (Barcelona, 1936), vol. 1, 97-109.

⁴ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Codices Vaticani Hebraici*, 144-145.

⁵ Delio Vania Proverbio, "Vangeli. Ebraico," in *I Vangeli dei Popoli. La Parola e l'immagine del Cristo nelle culture e nella storia*, eds. F. D'Aiuto, G. Morello, and A.M. Piazzoni (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2000), 372-374.

⁶ *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library: Catalogue*, compiled by the staff of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, edited by Benjamin Richler, palaeographical and codicological descriptions by Malachi Beit-Arié in collaboration with Nurit Pasternak, Studi e Testi, 438 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2008), 67.

⁷ A. Marx, "The Polemical Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Related Studies in Memory of A. S. Freidus* (New York, 1929), 270-273.

⁸ M. Delcor, "Un manuscrit hébraïque inédit des quatre évangiles conservé à la Bibliothèque Vaticane (Hebr. 100)," *Anuario de Filología* 7 (1981): 201-219. He compares the translation to other known translations of the Gospels, such as Shem Tob ibn Shaprut's translation of Matthew and points out, correctly, that the translation is not very good.

Constantinople, who might have been interested in having a Hebrew translation of the Gospels.⁹ The manuscript later became the property of the banker and bibliophile Ulrich Fugger (1526-1584) from where it made its way into the Vatican collection in 1623.¹⁰

2. Catalan as the language of the original and the Italianization of proper names introduced by copyists

It is relatively easy to show that the translation is based on a Catalan version of the Gospels.

2.1. Proper names, especially names of persons, are in general clearly transcribed from Catalan. However, as Maties Delcor rightly suggested, a copyist has often corrected these names by means of marginal corrections. Sometimes proper names appear corrupted in the text itself or have been changed into an Italian form. Finally, names usually appear in their Italian form in the headings of chapters, which must have been added by the copyist who Italianized the translation.

The list of the Apostles in Matthew 10:1-4 (f. 14r) is a good example of this state of affairs. Most names appear in the text clearly transcribed from Catalan: שִׁמְעוֹן *Simon* (which appears twice in the list), פֵּרִי *Pere*, אֲנְדְּרִי *Andreu*, גִּיקְמִי *Jacme* (appears twice in the list, but on its first occurrence, probably a result of a copyist error, it appears as גִּיקְמוֹ), זֶבֶדְדֵּי *Zebedeu*, יוֹאָן *Joan*, טוֹמַאשׁ *Tomàs*, קַאנְנִי *Cananeu*, יוֹדֵשׁ *Judes*. In three cases it seems that there are copyist errors: בֶּרְטוֹמִי instead of בֶּרְטוֹמִי *Bartomeu*, אֲבִפִּי instead of אֲלִפִּי *Alfeu*, טֶאֶדֵּי instead of טֶאֶדֵּי *Tadeu*. It has to be taken into account that the ending יֵי is the normal transcription in Hebrew of the mediaeval Catalan final diphthong *-eu*. Some of these Hebrew forms could also be transcriptions of names written in other Romance languages, especially some Occitan dialects, but as a whole they can hardly be transcriptions from any language other than Catalan. It also has to be borne in mind that initial *j-* of Catalan can be transcribed by זֵ (as in יוֹאָן *Joan*), גִּי, גִּי (as in גִּיקְמִי or גִּיקְמוֹ *Jacme*, גִּודִּיא *Judea*) or יֵי (as in יוֹדֵשׁ *Judes*, יֵשׁוּעַ *Jesús*). The transcription by יֵי can be explained because in mediaeval Catalonia, according to the testimony of Profiat Duran, the initial Hebrew letter *yod* was pronounced differently from the medial letter *yod*, probably fricative, as the letter *j* in Catalan, instead of approximant (as the medial *yod* in Hebrew).¹¹

Some of these names have been corrected by the same copyist of the text in the margins by forms which belong, in general, to medieval Italian dialects: פֵּרִי *Pere* → פֵּירוֹ *Pero*, אֲנְדְּרִי *Andreu* → אֲנְדְּרִיא *Andrea*, בֶּרְטוֹמִי *Bartomeu* → בֶּרְטוֹלֹמִיאוֹ *Bortolomeo*, גִּיקְמִי *Jacme* → יַקּוֹמוֹ *Jacomo*.

In two cases we see that the Italianization of the names has been made in the text itself: מַטֵּיאוֹ *Matteo* (instead of מַטִּיב or מַתִּיב *Mateu*) and פִּילִיפּוֹ *Filippo* (instead of פִּילִיף or פִּלִּיף *Felip*). In

⁹ Proverbio, "Vangeli. Ebraico," 374.

¹⁰ Much of the historical material presented here is taken from Harvey J. Hames, "Translated from Catalan: Looking at a Fifteenth Century Hebrew Version of the Gospels," in *Knowledge and the Vernacular Languages in the Age of Lull and Eiximenis. ICREA Studies on Vernacularization*, eds. Anna Alberni et al. (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2012), 285-302.

¹¹ See Irene Garbell, "The Pronunciation of Hebrew in Medieval Spain," in *Homenaje a Millás-Vallicrosa*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1954), 681.

both cases these names appear correctly transcribed from Catalan in many other places in the Gospels: מתיא in Mt. 9:9; Expl; Mk. 3:18; Lk. Prol:6; 6:15; פליי in Jn. 1:44,45; 11:43,46; 12:22; 14:8; פילי in Mk. 3:18; Jn. 6:5,7; 12:21,22; 14:9.

In the heading of the chapter, the evangelist's name has also been Italianized: מתיאו *Matteo*. The same thing happens with the name מרקו *Marco* in the headings of Mark (the Catalan form would be מרק *Marc*) and with the name לוקא *Luca* in the heading of Luke (the Catalan form would be ליוק *Lluc*). Curiously enough, in the headings of John we have the forms זואן (chapters 3 and 4) and יואן (in all other chapters) which do not correspond to the transcription of the Italian form *Giovani* but to the Catalan form *Joan*.

Accordingly, the word for chapter that appears in these headings is always transcribed from Italian: קפיטולו *capítulo*.

2.2. In some cases, the translator was not sure how to translate Catalan words into Hebrew so he just transcribed the Catalan word. Some of these transcriptions have punctuation in order to help with the pronunciation of these non-Hebrew words.

The clearest example, because of its frequency in the text, is the Catalan verb *escandalitzar* (Vulgate: *scandalizare*, English: *scandalize*) and the noun *escàndol* (Vulgate: *scandalum*, English: *scandal*). In the Vulgate there are 32 occurrences of these words. Five times (Mt. 16:23; Lk. 17:1,2; Jn. 6:62; 16:1) they have been translated in different ways, but in most of the occurrences the translator has simply transcribed the Catalan words in Hebrew characters. For instance, the text of Mt. 26:31-33 (a dialogue between Jesus and Peter just after the last supper following Jesus' announcement to his disciples that they will deny him) in the Hebrew translation compared with the text of the Vulgate:

31 אז אמר ישו לתלמידיו: כולכם תהיו אישקנדליזאטש בעבורי בזאת הלילה כי כתוב הוא. אני אכה הרועה ותתפזרו הצאן מן הגדוד
32 וכאשר אהיה קם חי אהיה לפניכם בגלילאה:
33 וענה פירו ואמר אליו ואם כולם יהיו אישקנדליזאטש בעבורך אני לעולם לא אהיה אישקנדליזט.

³¹ Tunc dicit illis Jesus: Omnes vos scandalum patiemini in me in ista nocte. Scriptum est enim: Percutiam pastorem, et dispergentur oves gregis.

³² Postquam autem resurrexero, praecedam vos in Galilaeam.

³³ Respondens autem Petrus, ait illi:

Et si omnes scandalizati fuerint in te, ego numquam scandalizabor (Vulgate).

The Hebrew words תהיו אישקנדליזאטש are not a translation of the Latin expression *scandalum patiemini* "you will suffer a scandal" but correspond to the Catalan words *sereu escandalitzats*: the verb *sereu* "you will be" has been translated and the participle *escandalitzats* has been transcribed. The same happens in the case of יהיו אישקנדליזאטש (which corresponds to Catalan *seran escandalitzats*, cf. Vg. *scandalizati fuerint*) and אהיה אישקנדליזט (Catalan *seré escandalizat*, cf. Vg. *scandalizabor*).

Similar forms of the Catalan verb *escandalitzar* transcribed in Hebrew letters, sometimes with small errors probably inserted by the copyist, appear in 20 other places; Mt. 5:29,30; 11:6; 13:41,57; 15:12; 18:6,7³³,8,9; Mk. 6:3; 9:41,42,44,46; 14:27,29; Lk. 7:23.

In Mt. 6:1, the translator seems to have had difficulty translating the Catalan word *ufana* "ostentation," and he first tries to translate it using the Aramaic word אמבזה "crowd" and immediately afterwards he quotes the original Catalan word *ufana*:

השמרו לבלתי עשות אמבוה בלעז אופנא ממעשיכם הטובים לפני העם מפני שתהיו בעיניהם אנשים טובים כי תאבדו גמול אביכם שבשמים:

Attendite ne justitiam vestram faciatis coram hominibus, ut videamini ab eis: alioquin mercedem non habebitis apud Patrem vestrum qui in caelis est (Vg).

Several other Catalan words are found transcribed from Catalan in the translation and are not translated in the Hebrew:

	<i>Latin</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Catalan</i>	<i>English</i>
Mt. Prol: 4, 7, 11	Evangelium	אונגלי, אונגלי	evangeli	Gospel
Mt. Prol:17	evangelistae	אונגלישטש	evangelistes "evangelists"	Gospels
Mt. 3:7	Viperarum	[ויבריש <] ויבדיש	vibres	vipers
Mt. 27:28	Ø	סינדאט	sendat	fine silk fabric
Mk. 4:37	in pupi	אִינפּופּא	en (la) popa	in the stern

2.3. Other details of the Hebrew text show that it was not translated from the Latin text of the Vulgate, and very often precisely reflect the different linguistic characteristics of the Catalan original.

This can be deduced from the fact that the passive forms of the Vulgate correspond in the Hebrew translation to periphrastic forms which reflect the passive periphrastic forms of a Romance language. Three examples from the beginning of John will suffice (we enclose between parenthesis the expected Hebrew synthetic forms had the translation been based on the Latin):

	<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Catalan</i>
Jn. 1:31	manifestetur	היה מפורסם (יגלה)	sia manifestat/revelat
Jn. 3:14	Exaltari	יהיה נשא (להנשא)	sia exalçat
Jn. 3:17	Salvetur	יהיה נושע (יוֹשֶׁעַ)	sia salvat

The final occlusive consonants *-b*, *-d* and *-g* of proper names are sometimes transcribed using the equivalent voiceless occlusives פ, ט/ת and ק, according to the most usual pronunciation of these consonants in Catalan (except before a voiced consonant):

	<i>Sixto-Clementine Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	
Mt. 1:4	Aminadab	אמינדף	<i>-b</i> → פ (- <i>p</i>)
Mt. 1:14	Eliud	אליאט	<i>-d</i> → ט/ת (- <i>t</i>)
Lk. 3:35	Sarug	שירוק	<i>-g</i> → ק (- <i>c</i>)

Some erroneous translations in the Gospels are easily explained when the fact that the base text was Catalan is taken into account. There are plenty of examples, but here are three taken from the first chapters of Matthew:

(a) In Mt. 4:23, the Vulgate says: “*Et circuibat Jesus totam Galilaeam, docens in synagogis eorum, et praedicans Evangelium regni,*” that is to say: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.” However, the Hebrew translation reads: ...ישואש משיח היה מחפש כל ארץ גלילאה... “Jesus Christ searched all the land of Galilee ...,” which clearly does not express the right meaning of the Gospel text. The translator has clumsily translated the old Catalan verb *cercava*, which had the meaning “to search,” as in modern Catalan, but also the meaning “to go about,” “to go through,” which would have been the right meaning here.

(b) In Mt. 6:10 the bad Hebrew translation ויבא למלכותך “Come to your kingdom!” instead of ויבא מלכותך “Your kingdom come!” can be explained because in fourteenth-fifteenth century Catalan the vowels *e* and *a* in an unstressed syllable were already pronounced as shwa [ə] and are often confused in the manuscripts. The original Catalan manuscript probably had *Que vingui al teu Regne* “That he comes to your kingdom” (as, in fact, the Peiresc manuscript, which will be discussed in the next section, reads) instead of *Que vingui el teu Regne* “That your kingdom come.”

(c) In Mt. 6:27 the Hebrew text says: ומי מכם יכול להוסיף לחיי גופו מדה אחת “And which one of you can add one measure to the life of his body?,” which makes no sense. The Vulgate has: “*Quis autem vestrum cogitans potest adjicere ad staturam suam cubitum unum.*” The Peiresc manuscript of the *Biblia del segle XIV* has translated *staturam* correctly as *mida*, but in some manuscripts the letter *m* was read as *u* and the result was *uida*, that is to say, *vida* “life,” the word which has been translated in Hebrew as חיי[ם].

Curiously enough, at least in one case (Mt. 11:22) a combination of two proper names has been transcribed, including the conjunction and two prepositions, from Catalan to Hebrew instead of being translated:

Latin	Hebrew	Catalan	English
Tyro et Sidoni	דטיר אי דשידון	de Tir e [or: i] de Sidon	of Tyre and of Sidon

3. The Fourteenth-Century Catalan Bible as the original of the Hebrew translation

Among the different extant medieval Catalan versions of the Bible, there are three complete manuscripts of the Gospels:

1. The Palau Gospels or Palau Codex, dating back to the first half of the fifteenth century (Sant Cugat del Vallès, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Ms. ANC1-960-T-1038 [fons Requesens-Palau]).

2. The Marmoutier manuscript, dating back to the mid-fourteenth century, which contains the whole New Testament (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. esp. 486).

3. The Peiresc manuscript, which contains the whole of the Bible and was copied between 1460 and 1470 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. esp. 2, 3 and 4).

The Peiresc and Marmoutier manuscripts belong to a full translation of the Bible into Catalan that was prepared during the fourteenth century and is called the Fourteenth-Century Bible. However the text that appears in the Peiresc manuscript was probably copied several times between the date of the translation (the first half of the fourteenth century) and the date of the manuscript (1460-1470) and both manuscripts (Peiresc and Marmoutier) have abundant and significant differences in their translations.

A comparison of the Hebrew translation of the Gospels and these three manuscripts reveals that the Catalan translation found in the Peiresc manuscript was the basis for the Hebrew text. It should be noted, however, that the Hebrew translation often differs from the Peiresc manuscript, implying that the translation was carried out using an older manuscript than Peiresc that contained a lot of variants from the Peiresc manuscript.

In the Hebrew translation, the four Gospels appear in the classical order of the Vulgate. Before each of the Gospels, except for John, there is a short introduction, partly based on St. Jerome's introduction to his *Commentary on Matthew*. A comparison with the prefaces to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke in the Peiresc manuscript shows that they are the same. Most of the idiosyncrasies of the Hebrew are found in the Catalan prefaces, and aside from some minor differences the Hebrew seems to be a very literal translation of the Catalan. For instance, the introduction to Matthew states that it was written in Hebrew for the Jewish followers of Jesus, that although there were many other gospels, there are four authorized ones, and it identifies each of the four gospel authors with one of the four creatures in Ezekiel's famous vision.¹² However, unlike Jerome who claims that Matthew was a Levite, it is Mark who is given that honor in both the Catalan edition and Hebrew translation. In addition, it is Matthew and not John, as in Jerome, who writes in order to defend Christianity from the heretics, and the tradition that Mark cut off one of his fingers so that he would not be able to work in the Temple as a priest, "but the Lord seeing his faith, saved what was lost, and returned his finger" is also in the Catalan preface to Mark, but is not found in Jerome.¹³

The Catalan prefaces to the Gospels in the Peiresc manuscript are from different sources. However, what is clear is that the translator of the Hebrew gospel used a manuscript that already contained these prefaces as it is extremely unlikely that he had different Catalan manuscripts each containing one of these prefaces. The Hebrew translation does not contain the preface to John which might suggest that the translator used a manuscript that then became the basis for the Peiresc edition of the Gospels to which additional material, such as the preface to John was then added.¹⁴ This possibility should also be considered regarding the chapter divisions of Matthew. In the Hebrew edition, there are 54 chapters, whereas in the versions later than 1230, the chapter divisions are as found in the modern printed editions. This division into 54 chapters does not correspond to any Vulgate manuscripts pre-1230 and perhaps reflects the divisions to be found in an older Catalan manuscript of the Gospels, as the Peiresc manuscript follows the post 1230 division into chapters. In the Hebrew translation of the other three Gospels, Mark has 16 chapters as does Peiresc, Luke 25 to Peiresc' 24, and John has 21 to Peiresc' 20.

¹² See Thomas P. Scheck, *St Jerome, Commentary on Matthew*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 117 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 51-58.

¹³ Ms. Vatican ebr. 100, f. 47r.

¹⁴ For more information and relevant bibliography, see Harvey J. Hames, "Translated from Catalan: Looking at a Fifteenth Century Hebrew Version of the Gospels," 291

As to the text of the Gospels itself, a close comparison of the Hebrew text with the text of manuscript Peiresc and with the Vulgate shows clearly that the Hebrew translation was made from a manuscript containing the same translation copied, with many errors and variants, in the Peiresc manuscript.

Here are some examples taken from the Gospel of Matthew:

Some omissions that are found in the Hebrew translation are found also in Peiresc. In some cases this is especially notable because the omission causes the text to be grammatically incorrect, as happens with the first of the two omissions in Mt. 9.36-37. It is worth stressing that the Hebrew translation follows the order of the words in Peiresc and the modes and tenses of the verbs:

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Peiresc</i>
Videns autem turbas, misertus est eis: quia erant vexati, et jacentes <u>sicut oves</u> non habentes pastorem. Tunc dicit discipulis suis	וכאשר [*] העמים שהיו בצער ושוכבים [*] בלי רועה ריחם עליהן ואמר לתלמידיו	E quant [*] les gens qui éran traballades e éran [*] sens pastor, hach piatat d'ells, e dix alls dexebls:
“And <u>seeing</u> the multitudes, he had compassion on them: because they were distressed, and lying <u>like sheep</u> that have no shepherd. Then he said to his disciples”	“And when [*] the multitudes which were in grief and lying [*] without a shepherd, he had compassion on them, and said to his disciples”	“And when [*] the multitudes which were in distress and were [*] without a shepherd, he had compassion on them, and said to the disciples”

The additions to the text of the Vulgate that we find in the Hebrew translation usually are also to be found in the Peiresc manuscript. The occurrence of the Catalan word *sendat*,¹⁵ already mentioned in the previous section, is one of these – in this case minor – additions (Mt. 27:28) (or a periphrastic translation of Latin *coccineam*):

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Peiresc</i>
Et exuentes eum clamydem coccineam circumdederunt ei.	והפשטוהו וכסוהו עם סרבל סִנְדָּאט אדום.	E daspulàran-lo, e abrigàran-lo da un mantell <u>de sandat vermell</u> .
“And stripping him, they put a <u>scarlet</u> cloak about him.”	“And they stripped him and covered him with a mantel of red <u>fine silk fabric</u> .”	“And they stripped him and covered him with a mantel <u>of red fine silk fabric</u> .”

In some cases the translation differs considerably from the Vulgate text and coincides with Peiresc, as in the second part of Mt. 4:4:

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Peiresc</i>
Non in solo pane vivit homo, <u>sed in omni verbo, quod procedit de ore Dei.</u>	אדם אינינו חי על הלחם לבדו אבל מחן השם	Hom no viu tan solament de pa, <u>mes de la gràcia de Déu.</u>
“Not in bread alone does man live, <u>but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.</u> ”	“Man does not live by bread alone, <u>but by the grace of the LORD.</u> ”	“Man does not live by bread alone, <u>but by the grace of God.</u> ”

¹⁵ On the spelling *sandat* instead of *sendat* in the quoted text of the Peiresc manuscript, see above § 2.3.b. The confusion of *e* and *a* in unstressed syllables is very common in this manuscript.

The difference is only with regard to a verb in Mt. 6:17 (the Hebrew and Peiresc coincide in forms meaning “to comb” in distinction to the Vulgate, that has *unge* “anoint”)¹⁶:

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Peiresc</i>
Tu autem, cum jejunas, <u>unge</u> caput tuum, et faciem tuam lava.	רק אתה כשתצום <u>שרוק</u> ראשך ורחץ פניך	Mas com tu dejunes, <u>pantina</u> ton cap e lava ta cara.
“But you, when you fast <u>anoint</u> your head, and wash your face.”	“But you, when you fast, <u>comb</u> your head and wash your face.”	“But when you fast, <u>comb</u> your head and wash your face.”

In some cases, the difference from the Vulgate stems from a copyist error in a manuscript of the Fourteenth-Century Bible. This happened, for instance, in Mt. 8:12, where the word *dens* (bad spelling of *dents* “teeth”; see two words earlier in Peiresc *tramolamens* instead of *tremolamens*) was read and copied by a copyist as *deus*, old Catalan form of modern *Déu* “God”:

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Peiresc</i>
Ibi erit fletus et stridor <u>dentium</u> .	ושם יהיה בכי ורעדה <u>מהאל</u> .	Aquí serà plor e tramolamens de <u>dents</u> .
“There will be weeping and gnashing of <u>teeth</u> .”	“And there will be weeping and trembling of <u>God</u> .”	“There will be weeping and gnashing of <u>teeth</u> .”

Sometimes there is a difference between the Hebrew translation and the Vulgate because the Hebrew translator has misunderstood the Catalan text of the Fourteenth-Century Bible. This is the case in Mt. 10:17, where the word *parlament*, which had the meaning of “assembly, council” in its context, has been understood as “speech, discourse” (a meaning that this word has in other contexts) by the translator:

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Peiresc</i>
Tradent enim vos <u>in conciliis</u> , et in synagogis suis flagellabunt vos.	הם ינהגו אתכם <u>בדבריהם</u> ויכו אתכם בבתי כנסיותיהם	car ells vos amenaran <u>en lurs perllaments</u> , e abatran-vos en lurs sinagogas,
“For they will deliver you up <u>in councils</u> , and they will scourge you in their synagogues.”	“They will lead you <u>by their words</u> and they will strike you in their synagogues”	“For they will lead you <u>to their councils</u> , and they will strike you in their synagogues.”

On several occasions, the Hebrew translation makes it possible to correct errors in the Peiresc manuscript which is full of mistakes. Here is an example taken from Mt. 6:22:

¹⁶ It is interesting to consider why the Catalan has “comb” instead of “anoint.” It is possible that the translator of Peiresc used a text which already had *pantina ton cap*, however, the act of anointing might not have made sense to the Catalan translator who instead changed the action to something more every day and common. For the Hebrew translator, combing one’s hair and washing one’s face when fasting might have some theological resonance, as on the two central fasts of the Jewish liturgical year, *Yom Kippur* (The Day of Atonement) and *Tish’a be-Av* (The Ninth of Av), these two actions are forbidden. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Laws Regarding Fast Days, ch.5 par. 10.

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Peiresc</i>
Si oculus tuus fuerit simplex, totum corpus tuum <u>lucidum</u> erit.	אם עיניך תמימה כל הגוף יהיה <u>בהיר</u> .	Si lo teu vull és simpla, tot lo teu cors serà <u>dat</u> .
“If your eye be simple, your whole body will be <u>full of light</u> .”	“If your eye be simple, your whole body will be <u>bright/clear</u> .”	“If your eye be simple, your body will be <u>given</u> .”

The word at the end of verse 22 in Ms. Peiresc makes no sense and does not correspond with the Latin *lucidum* “full of light, clear, light.” In the medieval Catalan manuscripts the letters *r* and *t* are often very similar, and the group *cl-* can easily be confused with a letter *d-*. It is very likely, then, that the original Fourteenth-Century Bible had *clar* “clear” instead of *dat*, and this correction should be made in the text of manuscript Peiresc based on the Hebrew.

4. *Who was the translator and who was he translating for?*

It seems reasonably clear that the historical context for the translation is a reflection of the increasingly difficult conditions faced by Jews in the Iberian peninsula in the aftermath of 1391, the Great Schism, the Tortosa disputation of the early fifteenth century and other polemics, the preaching campaigns, the civil war, and the mass conversion of many Jews including leading members of the community. As Shem Tob ben Isaac ibn Shaprut said in the introduction to his translation of the Gospel of Matthew in his monumental *Even Bohan* written ca. 1378:

I have seen fit to end this work I have called Touchstone with a copy / translation (*leha'atik – להעתיק*) of the books of the gospels ... for two reasons: the one, in order to use them to respond to Christians and in particular apostates who say things about their [new] faith without really knowing anything about it, and who in this context, interpret verses from our Holy Torah in opposition to the truth and in contradiction to their [new] faith ... Secondly, to show the defects of those books and the many mistakes they contain to the venerable members of our faith, and hence, they will know and understand the advantage and stature of our faith above all the other faiths, for one does not realize the greatness and stature of a thing until he has seen its opposite.¹⁷

Shem Tob's reaction to the mass conversions is paralleled by the translator of the Gospels in a Catalan context; however, there are some interesting quirks worth pointing out:

¹⁷ Libby Garshowitz, *Shem Tov ben Isaac Ibn Shaprut's Even Bohan*, critical edition (in preparation). This is part of Shem Tob's introductory remarks before the text of Matthew. See also George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995), which is a revised edition of the volume he published in 1987. However, this does not include Shem Tob's polemical remarks, which are of great importance for understanding his reception of the Gospel text. Here we cite from the critical edition of *Even Bohan* being prepared by Libby Garshowitz which does include the polemical remarks and comments on the text. In the meantime, one can consult, Libby Garshowitz, “Shem Tov ben Isaac ben Ibn Shaprut's Even Bohan (Touchstone), chapters 2-10, based on Ms. Plutai 2.17 (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana) with collations from other manuscripts,” 2 vols. (Ph.D dissertation, University of Toronto, 1974).

אמר מהמחבר שם טוב ברבי יצחק בו שפרוט: ראיתי להשלים חיבורי זה אשר קראתיו אבן חן להעתיק ספרי האונגליה עם היותם מהספרים היותר אסורים לנו לקרא פן יבואו התלמידים שלא שמשו כל צורכם וישתו מהמים ההם. עם כל זה ראיתי להעתיקם לשתי סיבות. האחת: להשיב מתוכם לנוצרים ובפרט למומרים שמדברים בעניין אמונתם ואינם יודעים דבר ממנה ומפרשים פסוקי תורתנו הקדושה בעניין זה הפך האמת והפך אמונתם. ובזה יגיע שבח ליהודי המתוכח עמם כאשר ילכדם בשוחתם. השנית: להראות לבעלי אמונתנו הרמה חסרון הספרים ההם והשגיאות הנפלות בתוכם. ובזה ידעו ויבינו יתרון ומעלת אמונתנו על שאר האמונות לפי שלא יודע גודל ומעלת הדבר כי אם בבחינת הפכו.

Strangely, the translator retranslates the verses taken from the Bible (Old Testament) from Catalan back into the Hebrew in a way which seems to indicate that he was not aware that he was citing the original. This is true even where the verse in the Gospels specifically mentions “as is written,” in other words indicating a direct citation from the Bible.

An example of this is from Matthew where according to the Gospel Jesus cites a verse from Zechariah 13:7. The Biblical text reads: הָךְ אֶת הָרֹעָה וְתַפּוּצִין הַצֹּאֵן. However, the translator has: “אני אכה הרועה ותתפזרו הצאן” which is a direct translation from the Catalan with no reference to the original. The Biblical text does not add the first person “I will smite the pastor,” but has the imperative clause “הך – smite” whereas the Catalan does have the first person “I”. However, the translator does not use the biblical terminology for the rest of the citation indicating that either he did not know it, or that he purposefully chose to follow the Catalan rather than the Hebrew original.¹⁸

It is possible that the translator wished to show where the Christian text differs from the Hebrew original and by literally translating from the Catalan, he could emphasize where Christians have misunderstood or purposely misrepresented the original text so that it should affirm their Christian reading. Yet on the other hand, there does not seem to be any polemical intent in the translation and in the obvious places where one might expect it, the translation is word for word and totally neutral.

Yet, interestingly, the terminology used for crucifixion and the cross is שתי וערב (*shti va-erev*) as in for instance in Matthew 27 when Pontius Pilate asks what should be done with Jesus called Messiah. The Hebrew text has “והכל אמרו יהי מונה בשתי וערב” – and they all said let him be placed on *shti va-erev* [i.e. the cross].” The Catalan has “E diguéran tots: ‘Sia posat en creu!’” *Shti va-erev* is a term adopted by the Jews in the Middle Ages to disguise the fact that they were speaking about the cross or the crucifixion and it is used broadly in anti-Christian polemical works.

There are other small, but significant, hints that suggest that the translator was a Jew writing for a Jewish audience and the purpose of the literal translation was so that his contemporaries could have more knowledge of these central Christian texts. This supposition is in line with Shem Tob’s introduction cited above, as well as with the intentions of the anonymous author of an almost contemporary work *Hoda’at Ba’al Din* (Admission of Guilt). In the latter work, the author not only showed the internal contradictions in the Gospel texts, but demonstrated how the Gospels could be used to prove the truth of Judaism.¹⁹ Hence, this Hebrew translation could provide learned Jews with the proof texts they needed to undermine Christian polemicists. However, the possibility also exists that this translation was carried out by a *converso* for others who, in the aftermath of 1391 and the Tortosa disputation, had converted or were considering conversion, in order to inform them about their new faith. This translation would make sense in the context of the Tortosa disputation and in the polemical tradition of Alfonso de Valladolid who was the first convert to write polemical works against the Jews in Hebrew.²⁰

¹⁸ Shem Tob’s version in *Even Bohan* cites the verse exactly as it appears in the Biblical text.

¹⁹ See Harvey J. Hames, “‘And on this rock I will build my community:’ Jewish Use of the Gospel in Fifteenth-Century Spain,” in *Christlicher Norden - Muslimischer Süden: Ansprüche und Wirklichkeiten von Christen, Juden und Muslimen auf der Iberischen Halbinsel im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter*, eds. M. M. Tischler and A. Fidora (Münster: Aschendorff, 2011), 215-226.

²⁰ See Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 143-173, and Harvey J. Hames, “Truly Seeking Conversion?: The Mendicants, Ramon Llull and Alfonso de Valladolid,” *Morgen-Glantz* 20 (2010): 41-61.

5. *Appendix: publication in the Corpus Biblicum Catalanicum*

The goal of the *Corpus Biblicum Catalanicum* (CBCat), a project of the Bible Association of Catalonia, is the publication of all extant Catalan versions of the Bible up to the nineteenth century (most of them are medieval versions) in forty-two volumes. Two volumes containing the books of Exodus, Leviticus, 1 Kingdoms and 2 Kingdoms (= 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel) of the Fourteenth-Century Bible have already been published, as well as a volume focusing on the nineteenth-century Bible. Other volumes are currently in preparation. Full information on this project can be found online at <<http://cbcat.abcat.cat/>>.²¹

The project includes some texts related to the Catalan versions of the Bible: a first volume on the history of the Vulgate (which is the origin of most of the Catalan translations) in Catalan-speaking countries, four volumes with biblical stories and two volumes on the Hebrew Bible in Catalan-speaking countries. The second of these, number 35, will contain the Hebrew Gospels translated from Catalan. The intention is to publish this volume by the end of 2015 together with an introduction in English and Catalan, a parallel translation into modern Catalan, notes, and a Glossary.

Below the transcription there will be a critical apparatus correcting errors by the copyist of the Hebrew manuscript and providing some comments on the state of the text. The notes below the Catalan translation will compare the Hebrew text with the Latin text of the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate and the Catalan text of Peiresc. The notes will also discuss special forms of the Hebrew manuscript and include comments on the different forms of proper names (transcribed from Catalan, Italianized), etc.

The Glossary will include and extensively comment on the Hebrew forms that in the opinion of the authors are worthy of notice, as can be seen in the following samples:

זבדי *antr. masc.* Zebedeu (Mt 4,21; Mt 10,3; Mt 27,56; Mc 1,20; Mc 10,35; זבאדי Mc 1,19; זדי Lc 5,10; מזדי Mt 26,37; זבאדי* Mc 3,17; סבאדי Mt 20,20; Jn 21,2; שבאדי Mt 4,21). – La terminació ם constant en la transcripció a l'hebreu d'aquest nom i corresponent a la terminació catalana *-eu*, és una de tantes proves clares que mostra que la traducció ha estat feta sobre un original català; vegeu Introducció, p. [...] . En Mc 3,17 hem corregit la forma זבאדי del manuscrit.

לישא *v. inf. constr.* Portar (Mt 10,9; 23,4; 27,32). – Infinitiu constructe del verb לישא en l'hebreu talmúdic i midràixic, corresponent a la forma לִישָׂא de l'hebreu bíblic i l'hebreu modern. Comentant Mt 10,9, M. Delcor, en canvi, proposa que aquesta forma hebrea transcriu el verb català *lleixar* en la forma de 3a pers. del present d'indicatiu *lleixa*;¹⁸ cal desestimar aquesta hipòtesi perquè: (a) El context sintàctic admet un infinitiu constructe però no una forma conjugada del verb. (b) El ms. Peiresc hi té precisament la forma *portar*. (c) El mateix mot amb el sentit ben clar de “portar,” apareix també en Mt 23,4 i 27,32. Possiblement M. Delcor desconeixia l'existència d'aquesta forma poc corrent d'infinitiu constructe. [Note 18: “DELCOR, «Un manuscrit hébraïque», pp. 209 i 213.”]

²¹ The predecessors of the Corpus Biblicum Catalanicum, and a detailed description of the current project and its importance for Catalan philology, are given in Pere Casanellas i Bassols, “El *Corpus Biblicum Catalanicum*: Un antic tresor que finalment comença a ser explotat,” *Llengua & Literatura* 16 (2005), 517-530.

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